WOMANHOOD, MELANCHOLY AND THE PROBLEM OF GENIUS IN THE WORK OF MARGARET CAVENDISH, DUCHESS OF NEWCASTLE–UPON–TYNE (1623–73)

by

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ABSTRACT

The study of Margaret Cavendish's life and work has been marked by accusations of madness. In recent scholarship, however, such 'madness' has been interpreted in terms of her eccentricity and audacity as it manifested in both her prolific publications and extravagant public appearances. Any suggestion that she experienced a clinical form of madness has been reduced to myth. Yet, during her own lifetime, Cavendish was diagnosed with melancholy, a condition that could affect both body and mind. In her own work, she ennobled her diagnosis to one synonymous with genius, vindicating her imagination and her writing ability.

The nexus of melancholy and genius formed part of a time-honoured tradition, dating back to Aristotle, that endowed its experients with praise and reputation. The problem was, as a woman, Cavendish could not (or rather should not) claim to 'suffer': genial melancholy was reserved only for the male scholar. This study will reinterrogate her engagement with the notion of mental trouble, tracing her re-evaluation of womanhood as she sought to authenticate her melancholic experience. Cavendish's 'madness' might therefore be more accurately understood as her self-conscious adoption of a genial melancholic persona with its promise of lasting fame.

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CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

Works of Margaret Cavendish cited in order of their publication date:[1]

PF	*Poems, and fancies written by the Right Honourable, the Lady Margaret Newcastle.* London: J. Martin and J. Allestrye, 1653. Wing N869.
PhF	*Philosophicall fancies. Written by the Right Honourable, the Lady Newcastle.* London: J. Martin and J. Allestrye, 1653. Wing N865.
TWO	*The worlds olio written by the Right Honorable, the Lady Margaret Newcastle.* London: J. Martin and J. Allestrye, 1655. Wing N873.
PPO	*The philosophical and physical opinions written by Her Excellency the Lady Marchionesse of Newcastle.* London: J. Martin and J. Allestrye, 1655. Wing N863.
NP	*Natures pictures drawn by fancies pencil to the life written by the thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle.* London: J. Martin and J. Allestrye, 1656. Wing N855.
P	*Playes written by the thrice noble, illustrious and excellent princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle.* London: J. Allestry, 1662. Wing N868.

[1] The citation of these titles and their chronology of publication is taken from *Early English Books Online* (*EEBO*), https://eebo.chadwyck.com/ [accessed January 2019). Unless otherwise indicated, all early modern printed texts in this thesis are referenced according to their first edition facsimiles found on *EEBO.*

O	*Orations of a divers sort accommodated to divers places written by the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle.* London: [s.n], 1662. Wing N859.
SL	*Sociable letters written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess, the Lady of Marchioness of Newcastle.* London: William Wilson, 1664. Wing N872.
PL	*Philosophical letters, or, Modest reflections upon some opinions in natural philosophy maintained by several famous and learned authors of this age, expressed by way of letters by the thrice noble, illustrious, and excellent princess the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle.* London: [s.n.], 1664. Wing N866.
OUEP	*Observations upon experimental philosophy to which is added The description of a new blazing world.* London: A. Maxwell, 1666. Wing N857.
BW	'The Blazing World' [1666]. *Observations upon experimental philosophy to which is added The description of a new blazing world.* London: A. Maxwell, 1666. Wing N849.
LWC	*The life of the thrice noble, high, and puissant prince William Cavendish, Duke, Marquess, and Earl of Newcastle written by the thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess, Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle his Wife*. London: A. Maxwell, 1667. Wing N854.
GNP	*Grounds of natural philosophy divided into thirteen parts: with an appendage containing five parts written by the Duchess of Newcastle.* London: A. Maxwell, 1668. Wing N851.

A Chronology of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle–Upon–Tyne[2]

1623 Margaret Lucas born at St John's Abbey in Colchester, Essex.

1625 Margaret's father, Thomas Lucas, dies.

The accession of Charles I.

1642 The English Civil War begins.

1643 William Cavendish (1592–1676), later husband of Margaret, is made Marquis of Newcastle. His first wife, Elizabeth (née Bassett), dies in the same year.

Margaret becomes maid of honour at Queen Henrietta Maria's court in Oxford.

1644 William suffers a heavy defeat at the battle of Marston Moor and leaves England for Hamburg, where he stays for seven months before moving to Paris.

With the Royalists' military position weakening, and the royal capital in Oxford vulnerable, Henrietta Maria and her court, including Margaret, leave for exile in France.

1645 Margaret marries William in Paris, she is 31 years his junior.

1647 Margaret's sister and her mother, Elizabeth (née Leighton), die of consumption.

[2] The material for this chronology is taken from the following sources: Margaret Cavendish, 'A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding and Life' in *Natures Pictures* (1656), pp. 368– 91; Sylvia Bowerbank and Sara Mendelson, eds., *Paper Bodies: A Margaret Cavendish Reader* (Letchworth: Broadview, 2000), pp. 35–7 and James Fitzmaurice, ed., *Sociable Letters: Margaret Cavendish* (Peterborough: Broadview, 2004), pp. 29– 31.

1648 Margaret's youngest brother, Sir Charles Lucas, is shot according to martial law at the command of Parliamentary forces after the siege of Colchester.

Margaret and William travel to Rotterdam, eventually settling in Antwerp.

1649 Charles I is executed.

William Cavendish is declared traitor to the government by Parliament and his estates are sequestered.

1651 Margaret returns to England with her brother-in-law, Charles Cavendish, to petition for the return of William's estates. She also seeks her own compensatory pension but is unsuccessful.

Charles manages to secure his brother's land at Welbeck and Bolsover.

1653 Margaret publishes her first text, *Poems and Fancies,* and its companion piece, *Philosophical Fancies,* shortly before returning to Antwerp.

1654 Sir Charles Cavendish dies of an 'ague' while visiting England.

1655 *The World's Olio* is published, followed by *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions,* a significant extension to *Philosophical Fancies* published two years prior.

1656 *Natures Pictures* is published with an appended autobiography.

1660 The restoration of the monarchy and the accession of Charles II.

William and Margaret return to England to live at Welbeck Abbey, Nottinghamshire.

1662 *Playes* and *Orations* are published in quick succession.

1664 Margaret experiments with the epistolary form publishing both *Philosophical Letters* and *Sociable Letters.*

1665 William is invested with the Order of the Garter in 1661 and is advanced to dukedom but retires from the court and public life.

1666 *Observations* is published, which included *The Blazing World*, though a separate edition of *The Blazing World* followed.

1667 Margaret is the first woman to be invited to attend the Royal Society. She later chose not to contribute funds for the establishment of a new 'college' of experiments (the war had left the family almost £1 million in debt), the plans for which are ultimately abandoned.[3] This year also saw the publication of her husband's biography, *The life of the thrice noble, high and puissant prince William Cavendish*.

1668 *Grounds of Natural Philosophy* is published.

1673 Margaret dies suddenly at Welbeck Abbey on December 15th, the exact cause of which is unknown.

1674 Margaret is buried in Westminster Abbey and is interred in a tomb of William's design.

1676 William dies on Christmas Day and is buried alongside Margaret.

[3] John Shanahan, 'Natural Magic in 'The Convent of Pleasure'' in Lisa T. Sarasohn and Brandie R. Siegfried, eds., *God and Nature in the Thought of Margaret Cavendish* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 158n.

Introduction

The Mad(wo)man and the Malcontent: The Aesthetics of Melancholy

i. Early Modern Melancholy and Margaret Cavendish

The connection between genius and madness has been long contested; are those on the margins of sanity more capable of accessing the equally peripheral strata of intelligence, particularly creative or artistic intelligence? In the *Phaedrus,* Plato affirms that '[i]n vain does one knock at the gates of poetry with a sane mind'.[1] Democritus, too, claimed that 'no sane-minded poet could ever enter Helicon'.[2] When affected with the vagaries of madness, then, the mind was thought to become 'a powerful crucible for imagination and experience'.[3] As such, the nexus of madness and imagination has featured in the avowals of writers for centuries, like that of John Dryden who attested that 'Great wits are sure to madness near allied/ And thin partitions do their bounds divide'.[4] These lines, taken from his *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681), satirise the Earl of Shaftesbury, who is frequently likened to the devil throughout the poem for his

1 Plato, *Phaedrus,* 245a, quoted in Frederick Burwick, 'Romantic Madness: Hölderlin, Nerval, Clare' in Gregory Maertz, ed., *Cultural Interactions in the Romantic Age: Critical Essays in Comparative Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp. 29–54 (p. 29).

2 Cicero, *De divinatione*, 1.80, quoted in Frederick Burwick, *Poetic Madness and the Romantic Imagination* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), p. 1.

3 Kay Redfield Jamison, *Touched with Fire: Manic Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1996), p. 3.

4 John Dryden, *Dryden: Selected Poems,* eds., by Paul Hammond and David Hopkins (Harlow: Pearson, 2007), pp. 150– 228 (p. 172).

machinations against the Duke of Monmouth, a popular challenger to the throne of Charles II.[5] Dryden's words endorse the venerable connection between madness and genius as much as they complicate it: is his diagnosis of madness here intended or hyperbolic? Regardless, Achitophel's 'wit' is charged with a devilish ambition tantamount to insanity. This heady mix of aspiration, imagination and 'distraction' was espoused by Dryden's generation with writers of the period readily adopting the mantle of frenzied creative to legitimise their work.[6] The connection between madness and creativity had what Matthew Bell calls 'the sanction of antiquity' that was desirable, even fashionable, for its authorising power.[7] In his 1978 study on *The Mad Genius Controversy,* George Becker writes that the 'aura' of madness,

> […] endowed the genius with a mystical and inexplicable quality that served to differentiate him from the typical man, the bourgeois, the philistine, and quite importantly, the 'mere' man of talent.[8]

More than a clinical condition, then, this particular brand of genial madness served a social function in differentiating and, most importantly, elevating the experient above

[5] Susan C. Greenfield, 'Aborting the "Mother Plot": Politics and Generation in *Absalom and Achitophel*' in Susan C. Greenfield and Carol Barash, eds., *Inventing Maternity: Politics, Science and Literature* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015), p. 86–110 (p. 86).

[6] 'Distraction' was an alternative phrase for madness found in contemporary medical casebooks; Richard Napier's casebooks (1597– 1605) describe the case of Thomas Page, a 'distracted' patient, in Michael MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety and Healing in Seventeenth Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 147 (see also p. 123).

[7] Matthew Bell, *Melancholia: The Western Malady* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 152.

[8] George Becker, *The Mad Genius Controversy: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1978), p. 127.

his peers. In claiming to 'suffer', he bestrode the perhaps equally 'thin partitions' between a pseudo-divine ability to channel inspiration and a prideful, Icarian, even devilish, ambition to succeed.

But what of women, especially the '[wo]man of talent'? To explore the efficacy of the female 'sufferer', this study will present Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, as the female paradigm of the 'mad genius', a role she engages with less for its accuracy in defining her condition, than for its enabling expediency in her pursuit for literary fame.

To establish the tradition of reading and presenting Cavendish as 'mad', one might begin with her nickname, 'Mad Madge'. Cavendish was and is still known by the sobriquet, despite its peculiar history. As the author of her 2003 biography *Mad Madge*, Katie Whitaker, suggests, it is variously assumed that Cavendish and her nickname coexisted, with the latter mistakenly attributed to one of her most prolific commentators, Samuel Pepys.[9] In fact, Whitaker attributes its coinage to the historian, Mark Anthony Lower writing in 1872, almost two hundred years after the Duchess' death. Lower writes that 'no modern reader, on a candid perusal of [Cavendish's] writings, will concur in attributing to her the nickname which her jealous contemporaries gave her – "*Mad Madge of Newcastle*"!'[10] However, Lower offers no

[9] Examples include Londa Schiebinger, 'Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle' in M. E. Waithe, ed., *A History of Women Philosophers,* Volume 3 (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1991), pp. 1– 21 (p.15) and Leigh Ann Whaley, *Women's History as Scientists: A Guide to Debates* (Santa Barbara: ABC – Clio, 2003), p. 99.
[10] Katie Whitaker, *Mad Madge: Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, Royalist, Writer and Romantic* (London: Vintage, 2003), p. 361– 2.

sources for his claims and it is not clear to what 'contemporaries' he refers. Over the course of seven months in 1667, Pepys recorded Cavendish's appearances in London city as the 'Lady Newcastle' and the 'Dutchesse', but never 'Mad Madge'. The letters of Dorothy Osborne and Mary Evelyn (written throughout the 1650s), too, though both equally disparaging of Cavendish's character, do not use the epithet; Osborne, upon reading the Duchess' first publication, claims that 'there [are] many soberer people in Bedlam', but never uses 'Mad Madge'.[11] Rather, Whitaker suggests that Lower's source was most likely a misremembered conflation of Pepys' belief that Cavendish was a 'mad, conceited, ridiculous woman' and the affectionate 'Madge Newcastle' first used by Charles Lamb, one of Cavendish's few nineteenth-century admirers.[12] Her mythic status as madwoman, or Bedlamite, was less a contemporary moniker than an accretion of critical responses to her life and work.

The history of the Duchess' nickname is perhaps fittingly, if ironically, shrouded in the same mystery as the history of the Duchess herself; both during her life and in the centuries that followed, Cavendish readers began to speculate as to whether she could have, indeed, been mad. As such, her literary reputation has been marked by questions of her sanity: a notable example is her role in Sir Walter Scott's *Peveril of the Peak* (originally published in 1823) as 'that old mad-woman, Duchess of Newcastle'.[13] In the

[11] '8th May 1653', Dorothy Osborne, *Letters to Sir William Temple* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p. 79.
[12] Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys,* eds. by Robert Latham and William Matthews, Volume 9 (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), p. 123 (18th March 1668); Charles Lamb, *The Life, Letters and Writings of Charles Lamb: Correspondence,* ed. by Percy Fitzgerald, Volume 2 (London, 1876), p. 64.
[13] Sir Walter Scott, *Waverley Novels: Volume 27 – Peveril of the Peak,* Volume 1– 2 (Boston: Samuel H. Parker, 1832), p. 206.

text, set around the time of the Popish Plot in 1678 (post-dating Cavendish's actual death by five years), Scott includes her in a peculiar cameo:

> An attendant on the Court announced suddenly to their Majesties that a lady, who would only announce herself as a Peeress of England, desired to be admitted into the presence.
>
> The Queen said, hastily, it was *impossible*. No peeress without announcing her title, was entitled to the privilege of her rank.
>
> "I could be sworn", said a nobleman in attendance, "that it is some whim of the Duchess of Newcastle".
>
> The attendant, who brought the message, said that he did indeed believe it to be the Duchess, both from the singularity of the message, and that the lady spoke with somewhat a foreign accent.
>
> "In the name of madness, then" said the King, "let us admit her. Her Grace is an entire raree– show in her own person – a universal masquerade – indeed a sort of private Bedlam-hospital, her whole ideas being like so many patients crazed upon the subjects of love and literature […] save Minerva, Venus, and the nine Muses".[14]

In fact, the 'lady' to which the attendant refers is ultimately revealed to be the Countess of Derby; however, the King's willingness to identify her as Cavendish speaks of the Duchess' vexed status as a cultural figure – her reputation precedes her. This reputation

[14] Scott, *Peveril of the Peak,* p. 281.

– which, as Scott would have it, is intrinsically bound to her 'madness' – is manifold. Her 'madness' is interpreted in polarised extremes: firstly, her audacious (and misplaced) ambition in requesting to be admitted to the presence of the Queen without revealing herself, and secondly, her pathological insanity reminiscent of the inmates of Bedlam asylum. The King ambiguously acknowledges her 'singularity', her 'foreign' accent (which is presumably an allusion to her time spent on the continent in exile, given that Cavendish confesses her otherwise poor grasp of languages in her own work), while the Queen offers an anecdote on the vulgar exorbitance of her dress: '[f]ull thirty yards of the most beautiful silk did her Grace's madness employ'.[15] Each aspect of her persona, as it is presented by Scott's characters, serves to emphasise her strangeness. In so doing, Scott encapsulates the unstable taxonomy of illness not only as it surrounded Cavendish and her legacy, but as it also symptomised the wider seventeenth–century experience in which the concept of madness proved philologically chaotic – what *is* or *was* madness, and was she mad?

That Scott's text was published in the nineteenth century, reimagining the seventeenth century, might further complicate the elucidation of the Duchess' madness as it was perceived by its readers. Scott's presentation of the Duchess no doubt contributed to, and to a large extent perpetuated, the somewhat dim view of her literary reputation. However, the spectrum of madness that he presents – from a clinical disease to mere quirks of dress or speech – has been a consistent feature of Cavendish's scholarship in its attempts to determine her (in)sanity. In the century following Scott,

[15] Ibid.

Virginia Woolf animated the tale of 'Mad Madge' and its nuance of mental illness by suggesting that 'the crazy Duchess' was 'crack-brained and bird-witted'.[16] As late as 1974, Stephen Pile's *The Incomplete Book of Failures* dismissed her work on the grounds of her oddness, identifying Cavendish as 'the world's most ridiculous poet'.[17] However, by 2014, Lisa Walters claims that scholars such as Katie Whitaker, Hero Chalmers and Deborah Bazeley had 'moved away from [the position that Cavendish was 'mad'], primarily because there is scant evidence to prove any type of mental disorder'.[18] Consequently, the notion that she might have experienced any form of madness has become mythologised and/or dismissed; Cavendish's 'madness' has been largely reduced to her eccentricity, her audacity in believing her ideas were worthy of publication in the male-dominated literary marketplace.

This study will therefore re-interrogate the notion of madness in Cavendish's work, in terms of both her nonconformity as it is observed by her readers and critics, and the clinical melancholic derivative that she claimed for her own. Though her (in)sanity has puzzled her readers, her work exhibits a preoccupation with mental trouble that – whether real or feigned – merits exploration.

[16] Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader* (London: Hogarth Press, 1925), p. 108.
[17] Quoted in Sylvia Bowerbank's essay, 'The Spider's Delight: Margaret Cavendish and the Female Imagination' in Sara H. Mendelson, ed., *Ashgate Critical Essays on Women Writers in England, 1550– 1700,* Volume 7: Margaret Cavendish (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 3– 19 (p. 3).
[18] Lisa Walters, *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Science and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 33.

In order to understand Cavendish's engagement with and representation of mental trouble, one must establish the dominant theories of mental disorder in the period. Melancholy was one of two broad categories of madness as defined by the luminaries of seventeenth-century medicine, the other being mania. Often the two conditions were understood as extremes of the same disorder; melancholy could develop into mania, and vice versa, which might explain why Cavendish's self-professed melancholy was deliberately misinterpreted as its manic counterpart by her more disapproving readers. The difference between the two conditions was delineated by Robert Burton in his extraordinary compendium on the condition, *Anatomy of Melancholy* (first published in 1621), in which mania is deemed 'farre more violent then *Melancholy'* and without 'all the feare and sorrow'.[19] As such, while the maniac might be found in Bedlam, the melancholic could function within society and was, even habitually, found behind a writing desk.

My understanding of melancholy, and madness more broadly, is informed by ancient Galenic humoral theory which, though not universally accepted in the period, remained the most influential in coordinating approaches to illness. It held that the body

[19] Burton also adds a third category, frenzy (phrenitis), which was marked by a delirium and fever not present in either melancholy or mania. Hereafter, *The Anatomy* will be referenced in the form of Partition: Section: Member: Subsection, Page Number, with quotations taken from the first edition, published in 1621 unless stated otherwise. Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy What It Is. With All the Kinds, Causes, Symptoms, Prognostickes, and Severall Cures of It. In Three Maine Partitions with Their Several Sections, Members, and Subsections. Philosophically, Medicinally, Historically, Opened and Cut Up. By Democritus Junior. With a Satyricall Preface, Conducing to the Following Discourse* (London, 1621), 1. 1. 1. 4, p. 12.

contained four 'humours', or vital fluids – blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile.[20] The general health and disposition, or 'temperament', of an individual was directed by the balance of these fluids. As such, a melancholic individual experienced both the moods and maladies associated with black bile.[21] Melancholy was, however, distinguishable from the other three temperaments (i.e., sanguine, choleric and phlegmatic) for its division into two separate, but parallel traditions causing a myriad of symptoms from arthritis, constipation, paranoia, despondency to creative brilliance.

The first, and arguably the 'lower', form of melancholy was a visceral disease affecting the gut in particular (as Erin Sullivan notes, in Shakespeare's *As You like It*, the name of melancholic 'Jacques' is a pun on Tudor slang for toilet, 'jakes').[22] In contrast, the second 'higher' form of melancholy was an exquisite condition associated with genius since the time of Aristotle, as the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata* (dated between third century BC and sixth century AD) asks: 'Why is it that all men who are outstanding in philosophy, poetry or the arts are melancholic?'[23] Throughout her oeuvre, Cavendish's own interpretation of her condition takes this higher form: her verses

[20] Keith Andrew Stewart, *Galen and Black Bile: Doxographical Strategies and Hippocratic Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), p. 64. For more, see Jennifer Radden, ed., *The Nature of Melancholy: from Aristotle to Kristeva* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Ernesto Grassi and Maristella Lorch, *Folly and Insanity in Renaissance Literature* (New York: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1989).

[21] The term melancholy was derived from the Greek 'melas' ('black') 'khole' ('bile'): Danijela Kambaskovic, 'Humoral Theory' in Susan Broomfield, ed., *Early Modern Emotions* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 39; see also, Timothy J. Reiss, *Mirages of the Selfe: Patterns of Personhood in Ancient and Early Modern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 231.

[22] Erin Sullivan, *Beyond Melancholy: Sadness and Selfhood in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 112.

[23] Aristotle, *Problemata,* XXX, 1, reproduced in Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy,* p. 57.

spring 'not from Jupiters Head', she writes. Drawing on the condition's astrological pedigree – by which Jupiter is etymologically linked to 'jovial' through his alternative Roman name, 'Jove' – she infers her saturnine temperament; Saturn is the talismanic counterbalance of Jupiter and the attendant of the melancholic disposition.[24]

In his seminal work, *The Elizabethan Malady,* Lawrence Babb suggests that throughout the sixteenth and into the seventeenth century, 'Englishmen were not troubled by the opposition between the two concepts of melancholy', the visceral and the cerebral: '[t]hey accepted both'.[25] He concludes that 'in general the attitude [towards the condition] was definitely one of respect'.[26] Since Babb, work has been done to try and establish the definition of melancholy on either side of the divide between Galenic and pseudo-Aristotelian interpretations. Douglas Trevor is one such critic, suggesting that although the belief that melancholy encouraged genial abilities was a popular one in early modern England, the temperament's concomitant humour (pathological black bile) presented 'a very real danger' to its experients.[27] Rather than Babb's picture of an acceptable compromise between its mental and physical symptoms, for Trevor, the melancholic experience was something of a 'reverse Faustian bargain' in which the

[24] For more, see Raymond Klibansky, et. al., *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1964), p. 127, p. 397.

[25] Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady: A Study in Melancholia in English Literature* (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1951), p. 180.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Douglas Trevor, *The Poetics of Melancholy in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 6; see also, Winfried Schleiner, *Melancholy, Genius and Utopia in the Renaissance* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1991), p. 24– 5.

sufferer must submit his body to the lamentable rigours of its humour in the vain hope of genial inspiration.[28]

It is this genial manifestation of melancholy that appealed most to Cavendish. Though there were doubtless many other women who believed that they experienced the same condition, Cavendish is uncommon, if not alone, in committing her thoughts to paper which she then made available for public consumption. According to her memoir 'A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding and Life' published in 1656, her disposition was such,

> [I]t is more inclining to be melancholy than merry, but not crabbed or peevishly melancholy, but soft melting solitary, and contemplating melancholy; and I am apt to weep rather than laugh (*NP,* 388)

As Juliana Schiesari has demonstrated, in the early modern period, melancholy was construed as a 'prestigious pathos' reserved exclusively for men, at least in the public realm. Women sufferers, on the other hand, were reduced to 'utter inarticulateness';

> When melancholia is considered undesirable it is stereotypically metaphorised as feminine or viewed as an affliction women bring onto men; when melancholia is

[28] Trevor, *The Poetics of Melancholy,* p. 7.

> valued as a creative condition, however, its privilege is grounded on an implicit or explicit exclusion of women.[29]

Ostensibly, then, Cavendish's claims to melancholy are doubly provocative: they challenge a significant and historic division of male privilege and do so through the medium of the female voice in a bold championing of her own subjectivity.

Even before her writing career began, Cavendish's self-fashioning manifested an inclination to melancholy. In her love letters to Newcastle, before their marriage in 1645, she bemoans her illness in terms of a sombre, self-annihilating mood,

> [B]ut supos me now in a veuy mallancholy humer, and that most off my contemplations are fext on nothing but dessolutions, for I look apon this world as on a deth's head for mortefecation, for I see all things subiet to allteration and chaing, and our hopes as if they had takin opium.[30]

As her career progressed and her self-fashioning became more sophisticated, her portrayal of melancholy encompassed more significant aspects of the tradition of dynamic illness. An essential part of this was her portrayal of writing as a 'disease',

[29] Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 18.

[30] The original letters are held in the British Library (MS Add. 70499, fols. 259– 97). They are reprinted in Richard William Goulding, ed., *Letters written by Charles Lamb's 'Princely Woman, the thrice noble Margaret Newcastle' to her husband: from the originals at Welbeck Abbey* (London: J. Murray, 1909), p. 9 which I have cited here, and have been reproduced in Appendix B of Anna Battigelli's *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998), p. 119– 32.

tapping into the decidedly male narrative of personhood in which illness was linked to the imagination: 'but what disease they will judg it to be, I cannot tell; I do verily believe they will take it to be a disease of the Brain' (*OUEP*, sig. C1r). It cannot be rightly described as 'Apoplexical or Lethargical disease', she writes, but 'an extravagant, or at least a Fantastical' one,

> [B]ut to be infected with the same disease, which the devoutest, wisest, wittiest, subtilest, most learned and eloquent men have been troubled withal, is no disgrace, but the greatest honour, even to the most ambitious person in the world: and next to the honour of being thus infected, it is also a delight and pleasure to me, as being the onely Pastime which imploys my idle hours. (*OUEP*, sig. C1v)

In doing so, she compares herself to fellow 'sufferers', Aristotle, Cicero, Homer, Virgil, Ovid, Hippocrates, Galen and Paracelsus, amongst others – all of them, men. In the loaded contrast between her ambition and the boredom of her 'idle hours', the Duchess goes some way towards declaring herself a rarefied female malcontent. There is a tangible disenchantment in her comparison to the 'most learned and eloquent men' of her age, while writing remains, for her, her 'onely Pastime'. As Laurence Babb writes, the most prevalent malcontent in early modern England was he who struggled with a sense of 'neglected superiority'; it is 'a man who has persuaded himself that he is melancholy, because melancholy signifies astuteness and profundity of mind'.[31] Could it be that

[31] Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady,* p. 76.

Cavendish, seemingly repressed by her womanhood, looked to reassert her self-esteem and public reputation through the guise of an illness that allowed its sufferer to be exculpated and, even, exalted? The pretence necessitated that she ennobled her symptoms from physical to cerebral in the hope that she, too, could be ennobled and preserved as such in the history of the literary tradition.

There was, then, method in her 'madness'.

Of course, the melancholy reserved for Cavendish as a female sufferer, in contemporary medical texts and the minds of their practitioners, was the undesirable kind described by Trevor, 'said to cause not prodigious aptitude but madness'.[32] Rather than a mental condition, female melancholy was understood as an uterine pathology; Nicholas Culpeper's *A Directory for Midwives* (1651) includes a symptom list for 'melancholy of Virgins and Widows' under a section on disorders of the womb.[33] Alongside the typically bodily manifestation of female melancholy, the simultaneous presence of genial motifs in Cavendish's work suggests that the dichotomy later registered by Babb was at least a pertinent one for the seventeenth-century lady. However, while Babb suggests that the two forms of the condition were neatly compatible, even acceptable, Cavendish's oeuvre demonstrates her struggle with the oppositions that melancholy presented – mind/body, genius/madness, man/woman. And, one could argue, in the epistemological vacuum created by these oppositions, the condition was made available and accessible in all its nuanced and chaotic forms.

[32] Trevor, *The Poetics of Melancholy,* p. 6.

[33] Nicholas Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives* (London, 1651), p. 118– 9.

Cavendish's experience of melancholy is therefore founded on issues of entitlement: to what extent can she assume the role of 'melancholic' and, more pertinently, that of melancholic genius?

ii. This Thesis and its Contribution to Scholarship

Ultimately, then, the question as to whether Cavendish was mad or not may prove a reductive one – one should not seek to diagnose her in hindsight and, even so, the notion of 'madness' is, itself, contentious. Instead, this study will posit a larger question with more far-reaching implications for scholarship on Cavendish's literary output: what role did madness, specifically melancholy madness, have to play in her self-fashioning as a legitimate author? Legitimacy, in this context, refers to the process by which Cavendish's venture into authorship was authenticated. Regardless of the truth of her melancholic experience, this study will argue that Cavendish's work broaches the condition as an aesthetic construct that informs and enriches her self-fashioning as a fameworthy poet, dramatist and she-philosopher. In contrast to existing studies on Cavendish's melancholy, which interpret it merely as a consequence of a life punctuated by grief and isolation, this thesis argues that her experience of the condition is purposeful, strategic and so worthy of further scholarly attention. Here, melancholy serves as a *habitus*, a term denoting the physical embodiment of 'a system of modes of perception, of thinking, of appreciation and of action'; it is a way of living, which draws on a multitude of cultural dispositions including the genial scholar, the melancholic, the

mad(wo)man and the malcontent.[34] This study is therefore unique in offering an extended exposition of melancholy as strategy in Cavendish's work, a strategy that implicates her interpretation of her gender (in which womanhood is associated with a more instinctual creativity) and coordinates her attempts to claim membership to the genial tradition. Indeed, the subject of genius, particularly melancholic genius, in her work is yet to be considered in Cavendish scholarship.

This study will thus intersect with multiple disciplines besides its contribution to Cavendish studies; indeed, the three objects of enquiry – womanhood, melancholy and genius – necessarily engage with the fields of women's writing, medical humanities and traditions of intellectual history respectively. My method, drawing together Cavendish's published work and family manuscripts, also contributes to studies into the history, or materiality, of the book.

Until recently, Cavendish's supposed contribution to gender studies had a narrow feminist focus: in 1975, Patricia Meyer Spacks' *The Female Imagination*, buoyed by the developing interest in women writers in tandem with the feminist movement, was one of many works that served to reinvigorate scholarship on Margaret Cavendish.[35] This interest culminated in *The Anthology of Literature by Women* edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in 1985, in which the Duchess appears alongside such early women

[34] Chris Jenks draws on Pierre Bourdeiu's ideas on habitus from his work such as *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977): Chris Jenks, *Culture* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 132.

[35] Save for Grant's biography, *Margaret the First* (1957).

writers as Aphra Behn, Eliza Haywood and Elizabeth Gaskell. However, these early proto-feminist readings of Cavendish's work inherited much of its seventeenth-century stigma and prejudice: Spacks argues that the Duchess 'did not know that she was angry at the world that had kept her as a woman in a subordinate position', seemingly denying her the ability to know her own mind.[36] Gilbert and Gubar, too, quoting Virginia Woolf in 1925, label Cavendish the 'crazy Duchess', perhaps due to her flouting of conventional modes of female expression. As Gilbert and Gubar recorded in their *Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), a woman might express herself only within the remit of conventional pastimes, like needlework, as to preserve her modest silence: 'like Ariadne, Penelope, and Philomela, women have used their looms, thread, and needles both to defend themselves and silently to speak for themselves'.[37] Again, the female experience, and the expression of this experience, is limited to clearly defined parameters based on cultural norms. This study will rather explore the intentions of an author who, from a young age, exhibited a preference for 'the pen' than 'the needle' (*NP,* 370, 385) and goes on to intentionally subvert gender codes to appropriate the pen as the boisterous literary marketplace. Spacks, Gilbert and Gubar seem too ready to attribute her with a ruinous lack of self-awareness in the face of early modern patriarchy, when, in fact, Cavendish demonstrates a heightened sense of self, with self-fashioning and self-editing at the core of her authorial manifesto.

[36] Patricia Ann Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination: A Literary and Psychological Investigation of Women's Writing* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1976), p. 195.

[37] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth–Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 642.

This study rather shares the impetus of Cavendish scholarship that has, within the last twenty years, enacted a hermeneutical shift in the interpretation of the Duchess, and women writers more broadly, as an 'active' author (by which I mean cognizant of writing for a wider reading public and crafting her authorial persona accordingly). For example, in comparison to Spacks, Elspeth Graham's essay 'Intersubjectivity, Intertextuality, and Form in the Self-Writings of Margaret Cavendish' (2007) identifies a 'feedback loop' in the Duchess' work: 'reference to her subjectivity anchors and validates her texts, and her texts articulate her subjectivity, bringing it into being'.[38] Graham has also co-edited a volume on *Authority, Authorship and Aristocratic Identity in Seventeenth-Century England* (2016), in which both Cavendish and Newcastle feature as primary subjects. Though this exposition of the Duchess' writing is limited to her role as a Royalist noblewoman, the essays within it provide further support for Cavendish's profound awareness of her own individuality; as Alison Findlay writes, she 'self-consciously […] figures female wit as independent and inherently subversive'.[39]

I will, however, depart from scholars such as Graham and Findlay in my interpretation of such subversiveness. Though progressive, Findlay's comments are typical of more recent studies that recognise Cavendish's nonconformity (and her 'madness') only in the primacy of her public voice and its coincident encroaching on

[38] Elspeth Graham, 'Intersubjectivity, Intertextuality, and Form in the Self– Writings of Margaret Cavendish' in Michelle Dowd and Julia A. Eckerle, eds., *Genre and Women's Life Writing in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 131– 150 (p. 135).

[39] Alison Findlay, 'Floggin' a Dead Horse?: Margaret Cavendish and the Pursuit of Authority' in Peter Edwards and Elspeth Graham, eds., *Authority, Authorship and Aristocratic Identity in Seventeenth– Century England* (Leiden: Brill, 2016) pp. 129– 150 (p. 135).

gender and generic boundaries. Indeed, Cavendish's creation and dissemination of her own natural philosophy remains the focus of discussions on her audacious belief in her own subjectivity, borrowing, re-working and subverting canonical texts of established male authors – Hobbes, Descartes and Bacon included:

> Cavendish understood that in becoming a female natural philosopher she was becoming a kind of monster, facing the monster's fate of being displayed and despised in the circus of the world.[40]

While this extract, taken from the work of Lisa Sarasohn, acknowledges Cavendish's self-consciously subversive ambition, it should follow that the Duchess *did* make attempts to assimilate herself in the tradition of a hitherto exclusively male authorship. While distinguishing herself as the only woman of her type (in a revised model of womanhood, in which she is 'Margaret the First'), for her work to be recognised, she still had to appeal to a decidedly male audience. Her fate is, then, more nuanced than 'being displayed and despised'.

Lisa Walters' 2014 study of gender, science and politics in Cavendish's work is perhaps more effective in registering how the Duchess re-appropriates and, at times, dismantles these structures, for example, in her revision of contemporary understandings of physiology – in which men fostered frenzied heat, and women,

[40] Lisa Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010), p. 16.

stagnant cold.[41] Cavendish does not abandon this division, but argues for equality between the sexes *despite* women's association with cold: 'the motions of cold are as strong and quick as the motions of heat' (*OUEP,* 104). This idea would then place Cavendish at the forefront of the adaptation of the 'leaky vessel' archetype (which held that women were not only cold and moist, but fundamentally porous, orifical, grotesque and consequently unstable and potentially dangerous).[42] Walters stops short of this enquiry, however, and instead moves on to discuss how such noncompliance is borne out in Cavendish's natural philosophy, rather than pursuing Cavendish's revision of 'womanhood' as I intend to do here. My study therefore takes up where Walters leaves off and in doing so makes a significant contribution to existing studies into women's writing which might deny the existence of a self-conscious feminine model whose approach to gender is conservative, if provocative. In contrast, then, I will determine how, in Cavendish's writing, the female body is reclaimed and its volatility made powerful: the impulsive, whimsical, melancholic imagination is the most conducive to creativity.

This study has the most to offer to current scholarship on melancholy, and specifically, to female melancholy. Indeed, Cavendish's contribution to the literary depiction of melancholic womanhood, whose representatives throughout the seventeenth century are decidedly limited, has been overlooked. This lack of precedents is reflected in the small number of gendered discussions of melancholy in seminal

[41] Walters, *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Science and Politics,* p. 55– 6.

[42] Paster, ''Leaky Vessels: The Incontinent Women of City Comedy', *Renaissance Drama*, 18 (1987), pp. 43–65 (p. 44).

research, such as in Babb (1951) or Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl's *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art* (1964). The accretion of such studies and their lack of discussion about the gendered experience of melancholy left a void in the scholarship of the female melancholic experience that was first broached by Juliana Schiesari's psychoanalytical study, *The Gendering of Melancholia* (1992). In Schiesari's text, the asymmetry of melancholy's gender coding, or at least the literary depictions of such, is made known.[43] However, it should be noted that, though Schiesari traces the history of the idea from Aristotle, Hildegard of Bingen, Ficino, Isabella di Morra to Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud, her female exemplars are lacking. Rather than presenting women within the tradition, Schiesari offers the female melancholic as she is depicted in the works of male writers like Tasso and Shakespeare. The hypothesised 'inarticulateness' of these women that Schiesari identifies remains untested.

Following Schiesari, Heather Meek has produced a series of articles with the view to dismantle the premise that female melancholy is defined by silence. As evidence, Meek turns to the intersection of womanhood and hysteria (the eighteenth-century's gendered derivative of 'madness', the validity of which was frequently diminished by men with reference to its origins in the capricious womb) in the writings of the 'Bluestockings' and other women of the era. In these studies, the experience of women like Anne Finch, Hester Thrale Piozzi and Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, is rendered

[43] Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia,* p. x– xi.

'sociosomatic'; their work, in recording their hysteria, is charged with a social impetus.[44] Jessica Kate Monaghan has also looked to women writers in her study of 'bodily legibility' in eighteenth-century British culture. Like Meek, Monaghan identifies the potential social benefits of 'simulating sickness'.[45]

I would, then, present Cavendish as an earlier example of this same feminine model: a seventeenth-century woman, whose presentation of her melancholic condition has a predominantly social impulse – it is motivated by a desire to assimilate to a part of society, a genial elite, denied to her on the basis of her sex. This study, in parallel with those of Meek and Monaghan, traces Cavendish's manipulation of the melancholy motif from one of inarticulateness to one of self-affirming fecundity. Comparatively little focus has been given to the importance of melancholy in this self-fashioning; while it features frequently in discussions of her life and work, it is approached reductively. Joanne Wright, for example, writes that 'many scholars have noted Cavendish's melancholic state of mind engendered by the death and destruction around her', citing Sara Mendelson, Sylvia Bowerbank and Katie Whitaker.[46] In her biography of Cavendish, Whitaker asserts that the Duchess' 'symptoms were probably nothing more than

[44] Heather Meek, ''What fatigues we fine ladies are fated to endure': Sociosomatic Hysteria as a Female 'English Malady' in Yasmin Annabel Haskell, ed., *Diseases of the Imagination and Imaginary Diseases in the Early Modern Period* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 375– 96 (p. 376); Meek, 'Of Wandering Wombs and Wrongs of Women: Evolving Conceptions of Hysteria in the Age of Reason', *English Studies in Canada,* 35, 2– 3 (2009), pp. 105– 28.

[45] Jessica Kate Monaghan, 'Feigned Illness and Bodily Legibility in Eighteenth– Century British Writers', Ph.D. diss. (Exeter University, 2015), p. 5, p. 53.

[46] Joanne H. Wright, 'Darkness, Death, and Precarious Life in Cavendish's *Sociable Letters* and *Orations*' in Sarasohn and Siegfried, eds., *God and Nature in the Thought of Margaret Cavendish,* pp. 43– 58 (p. 46).

unhappiness and constipation'.[47] This interpretation would confine Cavendish's experience of melancholy to a reactionary response to grief and political isolation. In stopping here, her readers run the risk of perpetuating the gender divide entrenched in the history of literacy and readership which would deny women the opportunity to self-consciously articulate their condition.

This prevailing view has led to an almost systematic displacement of the notion of Cavendish's 'madness'; Cavendish scholars like Bazeley have explained away the Mad Madge myth without any reference to the Duchess' melancholy:

> Margaret had flouted her lack of scholarly credentials like a badge of courage. She had demanded a public voice on public matters. She had asked for public acclaim […] Without question, this was (and for many, still is) the stuff of madness.[48]

Sarasohn goes further, suggesting that Cavendish's self-knowledge was such that though, 'she knew that she was a cultural hermaphrodite, attempting to transcend her sex':

> Cavendish […] was conscious of the audacity of her effort. Whatever she did was not easy, but it was reasoned. She was neither silly nor mad.[49]

[47] Whitaker, *Mad Madge,* p. 103.

[48] Deborah Bazeley, 'An Early Challenge to the Precepts and Practice of Modern Science: The Fusion of Fact, Fiction and Feminism in the Works of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, 1623– 1673', Ph.D. diss. (University of California, 1990), 1.2, p. 15.

[49] Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish*, p. 191.

Again, the question of Cavendish's 'madness' is sublimated; it is a matter of her mettle, not her melancholy. While this study will not contend with Sarasohn's suggestion that Cavendish *knew* of her defiant behaviour, the equivalence of silliness and madness here, together with the notion that her 'reasoned' self-fashioning negates any form of 'madness', is problematic.

The widespread scholarly assumption that Cavendish's experience of melancholy could not communicate anything more than 'sadness' because of her sex, only serves to ratify Schiesari's research into the asymmetrical melancholic experience. Consequently, one might overlook her desire to participate in, or at least engage with the male genial derivative of the condition. Indeed, Jennifer Radden writes that 'the category of genius had no more place for women than had the category of melancholy', but Cavendish still offers her body, her ailing body as it is configured in her work, as an admittance ticket.[50] On this point, I will look to adapt the research trajectory of Sylvia Bowerbank's 1984 essay, 'The Spider's Delight': Margaret Cavendish and the Female Imagination'. Here, Bowerbank suggests that the quirks of the Duchess' writing style, her evasion of 'rules and method', should not be dismissed as a sign of her lack of formal education, but rather a deliberate manifestation of it.[51] I would argue that this same logic might be

[50] My definition of madness and melancholy in this introduction is informed by critical texts such as Jennifer Radden's *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and Matthew Bell's *Melancholia: The Western Malady* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). When discussing Cavendish's own interpretation of melancholy (and madness) in chapter five, I will refer to contemporary medical manuals, particularly Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (first published in 1621) to avoid defining early modern sensibilities anachronistically.

[51] Bowerbank, 'The Spider's Delight', p. 18.

applied to her approach to melancholy, that it is deliberate and mindful. In both cases, her brazenness is used to distinguish herself as a creative pioneer, a singularity that, she was convinced, would cement her lasting reputation. This will extend the work of Gabriele Rippl, who suggests that Cavendish's gendered appropriation of melancholy should be viewed as 'more than a clinical term', but also as 'an aesthetic concept'.[52] While Rippl limits this aesthetic to her 'over-active fancy' made manifest in her 'rambling, copious style', I would argue that melancholy, too, serves as a lived aesthetic that permeated her presentation of 'self' in her published work, her personal correspondence and what can be known of her choreographed public appearances.[53]

A significant source for understanding Cavendish's medical situation will be the Portland manuscript, a seventeenth-century receipt book. My reading of this text has been informed by recent scholarship in this area including Michelle DiMeo and Sara Pennell's edited volume, *Reading and Writing Recipe Books* (2013), and Elaine Leong's *Recipes and Everyday Knowledge* (2018). Both of these texts trace the existence of the receipt book as a foundational element of cultural history, a lynchpin of the early modern household. They also offer a significant contribution to studies on the history of the book, acknowledging the receipt book's placement in the somewhat awkward middle space between manuscript and print. Leong, in particular, details the particularity of the receipt book as a text that was both consulted and frequently put to

[52] Gabriele Rippl, 'Mourning and Melancholia in England and Its Transatlantic Colonies: Examples of Seventeenth– Century Female Appropriations' in Martin Middeke and Christina Weld, eds., *The Literature of Melancholia: Early Modern to Postmodern* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 50– 66 (p. 58).
[53] Ibid.

use, thus reflecting a process of 'both reading *and* making' knowledge.[54] My study will thus necessarily engage with similar texts in the field of medical humanities. In chapters four and five of this thesis, I will explore the ways in which such 'knowledge-making practices' are seen in the Portland manuscript through a detailed examination of its construction and evidence of its usage as a working medical manual.[55]

Combining this research with a broader look at Cavendish's life and work, my thesis will follow in the style of interdisciplinary texts like Michael MacDonald's *Mystical Bedlam* (1981) and, to a great extent, Erin Sullivan's *Beyond Melancholy* (2016). MacDonald's text broadly explores the diagnosis and treatment of madness in seventeenth-century England, which he views from a medical and religious perspective, supplemented by an extensive study of physicians Simon Forman (1552 – 1611) and Richard Napier's (1559 – 1634) casebooks from the period. MacDonald claims that,

> the history of mental disorder in early modern England is an intellectual Africa. Historians and literary scholars have mapped its most prominent features and identified some of its leading figures, but we still have very little information about the ideas and experiences of ordinary people.[56]

[54] Elaine Leong, *Recipes and Everyday Knowledge: Medicine, Science and the Household in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), p. 15.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Michael MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety and Healing in Seventeenth Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 1.

His method of supporting broader evaluative statements with details from some of the two thousand case records effectively resolves this issue. Sullivan, too, combines historical, literary and medical disciplines with an in-depth analysis of the casebooks and letters of Théodore Mayerne in her study of emotion during the Renaissance. Though Cavendish's life as an exiled Royalist is hardly 'ordinary', I will be supporting my study of melancholy, and particularly the female experience of it, in her work with information found in manuscript material to produce a more evocative and objective account of her condition which can then be compared to the public self-image found in her printed work.

Of course, one can only speculate on the nature and severity of Cavendish's illness. That being said, if scholars can agree on her conscious decision to depart from writing conventions and to disseminate her work publicly, then surely they should afford the same self-awareness to matters of her health. This study presents a new reading of Cavendish's authorial persona in which this conscious strategising of self as melancholic aims to overcome the contemporary strictures of womanhood that would deny her recognition as a worthy contributor to the literary tradition. In this way, this study offers a substantial contribution not only to Cavendish studies, but also those on women's writing more broadly and on melancholy as both illness and aesthetic: here, Cavendish serves as an early example of a woman who manages her self as it manifests in her writing in accordance with the tenets she deemed necessary to access a predominantly male elite, that of the melancholic genius. The role that melancholy plays in Cavendish's work should therefore not be underestimated, as it has been hitherto, instead it should be acknowledged for its integral role in shaping the direction of her

narratives (both fictional and non-fictional) and the scale of her prolific writing endeavour. This study will therefore suggest that Cavendish scholarship is asking the wrong question of the 'Mad Madge' myth. Beyond her self-fashioning as a melancholic, contemplative and introspective, one must ask *why* Cavendish adopts such a persona: what purpose might this serve in her writing manifesto that was ultimately geared towards garnering fame?

iii. Primary Materials

To take account of all thirteen original texts published by Cavendish would be beyond the scope of a PhD thesis, therefore I have chosen to focus on a small number: *Poems and Fancies* (1653), *The World's Olio* (1655), *Natures Pictures* (1656) and *Playes* (1662). I have chosen *Poems and Fancies* as it most clearly evidences Cavendish's motivations at the beginning of her career at a time when both her objectives and her writing style was seemingly unaffected by the opinions of her readers. Indeed, the text was republished in 1664 and again in 1668 as *Poems, Or, Several Fancies in Verse* with various grammatical changes and edits to the metrical structure of the poetry throughout; I am however concerned with the text in its most crude form, in which her writing is, arguably, at its most candid and unpolished. Both *Poems and Fancies* and *The World's Olio*, a miscellany of poetry and prose, are significant to understanding the scope of Cavendish's authorship not only in their spanning of multiple stylistic genres, but for their consideration of philosophy, science, politics and war. The latter, in particular,

furthers the former's ruminations on gender and the diverse natures of the male and female mind.

Her *Natures Pictures* volume, a collection of moralistic stories, shares a similarly eclectic range of matter (including 'Comical, Tragical, and Tragi-comical, Poetical, Romanicical, Philosophical, and Historical' tales, 'some all Verse, some all Prose, some mixt'). I am particularly concerned with Cavendish's autobiography – 'A True Relation of My Birth, Breeding and Life' – that she appended to the text. Much of what is known of Cavendish's life is taken from this autobiography with a proportion of its information uncorroborated by other sources. One should therefore be hesitant to assume that its content is factual. I am rather concerned with the text at a literary level as it serves an important function in the development of Cavendish's carefully crafted self-image.

I have made a conscious decision to limit my analysis of *Sociable Letters* (1664), a collection of epistolary essays, and *The Blazing World* (1666), a science-fiction prose piece. Both are considered significant texts in the Cavendish canon, however, they have received substantial scholarly attention in the last thirty years with both published in multiple modern editions. Instead, I want to give greater focus to Cavendish's *Playes* (1662), which has received comparatively little consideration despite offering an extended exposition of her views on women, marriage and female learning.

iv. Thesis Structure

This thesis is broadly divided into three sections, each with two chapters, tracing Cavendish's engagement with the concepts of womanhood, melancholy and genius respectively. Following this introduction, and before these sections begin, there is a short contextualising chapter one which provides a summary account of her life and an overview of the diverse and ambivalent nature of her readership – during her life and after her death – the likes of which established her reputation as an eccentric fringe figure. The biographical detail provided by this chapter is useful in outlining the tragic events that scholars have since deemed responsible for her pathological disposition, as well as contextualising the focal events of her life that will form the background to discussions in later chapters, i.e. the English Civil War and her consequent exile on the continent. The analysis of Cavendish's readership, using the various readers' markings found in the copies of her works held in the Bodleian Library, also provides a valuable context against which the subsequent discussion of her reception and reputation might be better understood.

Chapters two and three will focus on Cavendish's creative manifesto and how she resolved the tension this created when it was set against her womanhood. To fully explicate Cavendish's attempts to claim part of the genial melancholic tradition, one must determine how she viewed and promoted herself in the wider literary marketplace. Of particular focus in these sections will be the nature of the female imagination; the recurring criticisms of her writing, and what was thought to make her 'mad', was the audaciousness of its scope and the strangeness of its style. Chapter two will explore the former and chapter three, the latter.

In chapter two, I will analyse Cavendish's creative ambition, by which I mean the tenets of her creative manifesto: how she fashioned her writing identity and how she estimated her impact as a female writer in the period. This necessarily leads to a discussion of her engagement with seventeenth-century tropes of female modesty in which the dialectic of her conforming to and rebellion against convention is made clear. This chapter will introduce an important idea that will then re-emerge across the thesis: Cavendish's 'struggle for discursive authority'.[57] Coined by Lee Cullen Khanna (1993), the 'struggle' is used to explain the way in which Cavendish's ambitions depended on her simultaneously separating herself from the literary tradition as an exceptional woman whilst having to validate her place in that tradition by appealing to contemporary, and crucially to *male,* tastes.

This chapter will then discuss where Cavendish might have found inspiration for her own particular brand of womanhood, namely from two polarised French movements, the femme forte and the Précieuses. Both of these models were probably discovered during her time in exile on the continent and encapsulated her vacillating attitude towards authority in which she antagonised gender codes without subverting them. Her approach to gender allowed for men and woman to occupy two different realms of creative ability: men, that of learned knowledge and women, that of the creative imagination. This will lead to an epistemological and ontological discussion of creativity – *how* did the mind, specifically the female mind, seek to create? In her first

[57] Lee Cullen Khanna, 'The Subject of Utopia: Margaret Cavendish and her Blazing World', in Jane Donawerth and Carol Kolmerton, eds. *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993), p. 15–34 (p. 30).

text, *Poems and Fancies* (1653), in which she offers her most developed analysis of the subject, her attempts to answer this question span Cartesian and Hobbesian philosophies, materialism, atomism and vitalism.

Chapter three then continues the discussion of Cavendish's conformity and rebellion, specifically how this is borne out in the structure and form of her work, her 'wild' method. Focusing again on *Poems and Fancies* as well as *The World's Olio* (1655), both of which received criticism for their idiosyncratic composition, this chapter will explore Cavendish's belief that she was, to some extent, at the whim of her creative imagination. The notion that writing is an uncontrollable impulse introduces a further dialectic of control/freedom or power/powerlessness that has important ramifications for her exploration of gender politics and her place within it as a woman writer, and a Royalist. Indeed, the chapter continues to deliberate the liberalism of Cavendish's creative ideology; how she deconstructs and decentralises conventional power structures and their encoded models of gender outside the mind as a means to understand the seemingly chaotic creative energy – or what Sylvia Bowerbank has called, the 'anarchic formlessness' – within it.[58]

Having established the principles of her writing imagination, chapters four and five will look further into its pathological underside. These chapters will focus on Cavendish's engagement with melancholy, both as a clinical disorder and as a desirable condition associated with extraordinary imaginative ability. Building on the dialectics

[58] Bowerbank, 'The Spider's Delight', p. 13.

discussed in the previous chapters, chapter four will examine Cavendish's attempts to normalise the idea that a mind in a state of flux is one most conducive to creativity. This chapter will consider what Cavendish might have known about melancholy from two contemporary sources, firstly Robert Burton's famous compendium, *An Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), and secondly the Portland receipt book. This manuscript, currently held at the University of Nottingham, contains various medicinal recipes and correspondence between her husband, William Cavendish, and some nine physicians whom the family consulted over the period of around six years.[59] The text – which has hitherto been used in a largely descriptive capacity by Cavendish scholars – portrays the Duchess, diagnosed with melancholy, in the midst of the so-called 'Faustian bargain', willingly and repeatedly submitting her body to the ravages of Galenic and Paracelsian medicine in the hope of an inspired intellectual salvation. Rather than interpreting its subject matter at face value, then, this study will look to analyse in-depth the evidence of illness presented therein and, comparing it to Cavendish's narrative of illness in her fictional work, determine what it can reveal about her apparent ennoblement of her condition.

Chapter five continues to explore the Portland manuscript, principally how the evidence of Cavendish's mental and physical symptoms offered by the receipt book differ from her self-diagnosis as it manifests in her own writing. This disjunction forms,

[59] 'Booke, wherein is Contained Rare Minerall Receipts Collected at Paris from those Who hath had great Experience of them', Portland Manuscripts MSS PwV.90, The University of Nottingham, 'PwV – Literary Manuscripts in the Portland (Welbeck) Collection, 16th – 19th centuries', PwV 90, http://mss-cat.nottingham.ac.uk/DServe/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=PwV%2f90&pos=39 [accessed January 2019].

what I have called Cavendish's 'false psychology' – her exclusive focus on the psychological impact of melancholy, while her doctors identify only its bodily symptoms. As the family's letters to Doctor Théodore Turquet de Mayerne (1573 – 1655) attest, Cavendish was only treated for illness *in* and *of* the body. To further illustrate this discrepancy, I have included a brief comparison with another of Mayerne's female patients, Lady Anne Conway (1631 – 1679), whose headaches were believed to be caused by her melancholic inclination to study and learning but were instead treated with an alarming course of mercury. Despite Mayerne's advice, Cavendish sought to reconcile her diagnosis with its supposed psychological effects through her assumption of a specific brand of melancholy, melancholy adust. For Cavendish, this condition (which Robert Burton believed he, too, suffered from) consecrated the link she perceived between her illness and an exceptional, if not genial, form of creative intelligence.

Cavendish's ruminations on genius will be further explored in chapter six. Her claims to melancholy were driven by her desire to be part of a hallowed tradition that had associated the condition with genius since the time of Aristotle. This chapter will firstly present the work of Juliana Schiesari, whose work on *The Gendering of Melancholia* (1992) provides a sound basis from which one can explore what Schiesari identifies as, the 'asymmetrical' presentation of the melancholic throughout history – that the higher form of the condition, with all its seemingly psychological benefits, has been reserved for men, while female melancholics were presumed to only experience a visceral disease. This thesis, and particularly this chapter, will use Cavendish's case to

both disprove some of the claims made in Schiesari's seminal text as well as to extend her enquiry, identifying the same asymmetry in the tradition of genius.

Chapter six will analyse the construction of genius throughout Cavendish's oeuvre, especially in her collection of plays (1662) in which her female protagonists are repeatedly faced with a choice between marriage or freedom, both social and intellectual. Indeed, dealing with terms such as 'melancholy' and 'genius' necessarily implicate studies on the history and philosophy of ideas. As Quentin Skinner (1969) and his followers have suggested, one must be mindful to contextualise these terms as Cavendish would have been understood them at the time of their use: we cannot '[credit] a writer with a meaning he could not have intended to convey, since that meaning was not available to him'.[60] Thus, at each stage, I will be careful to draw out the cultural– historical background necessary to more thoroughly delineate how these words were applied during the seventeenth century. Focusing on *Youths Glory and Deaths Banquet* and *Loves Adventures,* in particular, I will compare the presentation of women here against contemporary conceptions of femininity, such as the woman as 'leaky vessel'.[61] This will then extend to the model of womanhood (and wifehood) found in accounts of Cavendish's own life, where an extraordinary libel case from 1671 and various letters from the masters of both Oxford and Cambridge Universities provide a fascinating insight into her role as a wife and, more broadly, as a woman. The libel case,

[60] Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory,* 8.1 (1969), pp. 3– 53 (p. 9).

[61] This idea originates in Gail Kern Paster's 1987 article on 'Leaky Vessels: The Incontinent Women of City Comedy' reproduced in Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 23.

presented by the servants of Welbeck Abbey, vilifies her conduct within the home, accusing her of siphoning money and preparing to leave for another man in the event of her husband's death.

In chapter seven, the previous discussions of womanhood and melancholy are brought together to assess to what extent Cavendish *could* claim to be a melancholic genius. This begins with Cavendish's own approach to female learning – again, as it is presented in her plays – as well as how the prospect of women's education was received throughout the early modern period. Indeed, her approach to genius is best understood in relation to the standards for women at the time. Of particular focus in this chapter is the vexed position of the learned woman throughout early modern Europe, illustrated by models of female learning like Sappho, as something to be less admired than to be feared or ridiculed. The second part of this final chapter will therefore assess the ridicule Cavendish received, both during her own life and after her death, as a woman who attempted to infiltrate the realms of literature, philosophy and science. Starting with the origins of the Mad Madge myth, I will trace Cavendish's critical heritage: how was she compared to other women writers of the age and how was her life and work remembered by anthologists and critics alike?

The various threads explored in this thesis are then brought together in the conclusion with a consideration of Cavendish's 'mask-making', by which I mean her adoption of strategised displays of self or choreographed personas in which that of the 'melancholic genius' is a leading part. Such apparently deliberate crafting of her writing identity might distinguish Cavendish from other female melancholics of the age, like

Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea (1661 – 1720), whose experience of the condition is comparatively private, self-effacing and, perhaps consequently, authenticated by male contemporaries. This thesis will argue that despite this 'mask-making', Cavendish's idiosyncratic experience of the melancholic condition still makes a valid contribution to the study of the idea and might even reinforce its tenets and significance in the literary tradition.

Chapter One

War and Whirlwinds: Contextualising Cavendish

i. Cavendish's Life

Before moving to consider Cavendish's writing in detail, one should outline some biographical details. Indeed, in the field of Cavendish studies, the Duchess' experience of melancholy is typically attributed to the profound grief and political exile that punctuated her life. Following her father's death when she was just two years old, a twenty-something Margaret (by this time married) experienced a succession of further bereavements:

> [M]y Mother lived to see the ruin of her Children, in which was her ruin, and then dyed; my brother Sir *Thomas Lucas* soon after, my brother Sir *Charles Lucas* after him, being shot to death for his Loyall Service, for he was most constantly Loyall and Couragiously active, indeed he had a superfluity of courage; My eldest sister died some time before my Mother, her death being, as I believe, hastned through grief (*NP,* 377– 8)

Born in 1623 at St John's Abbey, near Colchester, Margaret was the youngest of eight surviving children – three sons and five daughters – by Thomas (c. 1573– 1625) and

Elizabeth (*née* Leighton, 1582– 1647) Lucas.[1] By 1647, her sister and mother had died of consumption, while her brothers had given their lives for the Royalist cause in the English Civil War; within a year of each other, Thomas Lucas had died of his wounds and Charles Lucas had been executed at the hands of Parliamentary forces. Meanwhile, Cavendish had fled the war for exile in France, where she accompanied Queen Henrietta Maria as a lady-in-waiting, having served her at the Cavalier capital of Oxford from 1643. Her 'True Relation' describes her siblings' fears over her joining the Queen's entourage: that she 'had never been from home' and might be too 'unexperienced in the World' (*NP,* 373). This would prove all too true; Cavendish is careful to detail her painful time at court: 'I durst neither look up with my eyes, nor speak, nor be any way sociable, in so much as I was thought a Natural fool' (*NP,* 374).

Her situation worsened as the civil war progressed and the Royalist cause deteriorated: 'not onely the Family I am linkt to is ruin'd, but the Family from which I sprung, by these unhappy Wars', she writes (*NP,* 375). Indeed, the family she would be 'linkt' to was that of William Cavendish, subsequently referred to as 'Newcastle'. The commander of the Royalist forces in northern England, Newcastle had abandoned his post following his defeat at Marston Moor and fled to Paris in July 1644. Apart from the royal family itself, the fifty-year-old Marquis would have been the most (in)famous exile in the city. Despite this, he was still an eligible suitor. Comparatively, Margaret's own

[1] There was some early conjecture as to the exact year of Cavendish's birth. Anna Battigelli provides a quotation from *Poems and Fancies* in which Cavendish compares herself to a ship that, when the 'Rebellious Clouds' of war appeared, had passed through 'nineteen degrees' (*PF,* 155– 6). If Cavendish was 19 years of age when the war began in 1642, one could determine her birth date as sometime in 1623 (Battigelli, *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind*, p. 117– 8).

family fortune was being eroded by war: she notes in her memoir that 'this unnatural War came like a Whirlwind', which 'fell'd down' their home (*NP,* 372). Indeed, her family estate in Essex had been plundered by parliamentary forces in August 1642 on suspicion that her brother, John, was storing ammunition for the King. Such instances no doubt affected Margaret's reputation: early correspondence between Margaret and Newcastle reveals that the latter had been warned against the match by his friend, Lord Widdrington, most likely due to her dwindling wealth.[2] Another letter suggests that Queen Henrietta Maria was similarly vexed that she had not been made aware of their potential marriage: 'I hop the Qeene and I shall be very good frindes againe', Margaret writes, 'and may be the beter for the deffarances we have had'.[3] Regardless, by December 1645, Newcastle married twenty- two-year-old Margaret Lucas, who became Margaret Cavendish, Marchioness of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne.

Together the couple travelled from Paris to Rotterdam, eventually settling in the former home of Peter Paul Rubens in Antwerp in 1648; their time on the continent lengthened by the execution of Charles I in January 1649. Two months later, with the establishment of the Rump Parliament in England, Newcastle was listed amongst thirteen men 'proscribed and banished as enemies and traitors', condemned to 'die without mercy, wherever they shall be found within the limits of this nation'.[4] It would be another eleven years, with the restoration of Charles II in 1660, before the Cavendish

[2] Douglas Grant, *Margaret the First: A Biography of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle* (London: Rupert Hart– Davis, 1957). p. 82.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Mary Anne Everett Wood Green, ed., *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, 1649– 50*, Volume 1 (London: H.M Stationery Office, 1965), p. 39.

family could return to England and, more specifically, Newcastle's family estate at Welbeck Abbey. Though he was made Duke of Newcastle in 1665, William remained isolated from the inner workings of the King's court and public life. In retirement, it appears that he focused his attention on horsemanship and his own writing, contributing verses and scenes to his wife's material and acting as patron for established thinkers including Dryden, Flecknoe, Hobbes and Shadwell.

Throughout their exile, the Cavendish family, specifically Newcastle, had consulted a number of physicians on matters of health. One particular letter from Théodore Mayerne, written in 1648, suggests that the family's experience of melancholy – family meaning Margaret, William and Henry, William's son from his former marriage – was catalysed by their unfortunate socio- political circumstances: 'the tymes furnish you with subiect enough doe moue your speritts and Humours'.[5] While Cavendish's memoir does qualify this, there is ample evidence – with further evidence across her other works – to suggest her reframing of the illness as something not just triggered by her grief, but as the loadstone of her constitution. Indeed, in 1651, after travelling from Antwerp to England with her brother-in- law, Sir Charles Cavendish, to petition for the return of her husband's estate and a compensatory pension, she records how the journey had exacerbated her illness: 'I became very Melancholy, by reason I was from my Lord, which made my mind so restless, as it did break my sleeps, and distemper my health' (*NP,* 382). Moreover, one cannot overlook her presentation of the condition elsewhere as a natural, desirable melancholy manifesting in creative astuteness. Despite

[5] 'Booke, wherein is Contained Rare Minerall Receipts', fol. 14r.

her conventional tutoring in the female pursuits of 'singing, dancing, playing on Musick', the young Margaret is said to have developed an early preference 'to write with the pen than to work with a needle' (*NP,* 385). Cavendish's writing continues to detail the honing of her imagination in the suitable guise of the brooding melancholic: 'I would walk two or three houres, and never rest, in a musing, considering, contemplating manner, reasoning with my self of every thing my senses did present' (*NP,* 386).

Whitaker's 2003 biography of Cavendish is just one study to interpret Cavendish's account at face value; much of its anecdotal information is derived from the 'True Relation'. Battigelli and Mendelson, too, amongst others, similarly deduce little from the comparison between Mayerne's interpretation of the family's melancholy and that experienced by Cavendish as it is presented in her own work. This study will analyse these discrepancies; the inconsistences therein will then reveal to what extent Cavendish actively controlled and manipulated her personal narrative and self-fashioning according to the socially acceptable standards, or *habitus*, of the melancholic genius. That she actively crafted this record of her life means that one should treat the autobiographical material therein with caution, approaching it as critically as one would her prose and poetry for its part in the development of her anterior authorial persona. Describing her melancholy as 'soft melting solitary, and contemplating' rather than crabbed and peevish, Cavendish inscribes her early life with a natural inclination for the contemplation typical of the (male) melancholic scholar.

In publishing her own autobiography, Cavendish made her most extravagant departure from her female predecessors and contemporaries. For the few early modern

women who recorded their lives, autobiography took the form of a conversion narrative and was then only circulated in manuscript form within the religious community concerned. The woman writer had to justify her decision to recount her life and, in such a narrative, this was provided by the plotting of her spiritual awakening.[6] Cavendish's autobiographical excursus, tagged to the end of her *Natures Pictures* volume, diverges from these models as the first example of an entirely secular piece of life-writing recorded by a woman and then disseminated to the public.[7] More provocatively, Cavendish registers her departure from these religious templates and makes her subversion clear as she concludes,

> …I could most willingly exclude my self, so as Never to see the face of any creature, but my Lord, as long as I live, inclosing my self like an Anchoret, wearing a Frize-gown tied with a cord about my waste. (*NP,* 390)

She metaphorises the anchoritic narrative; rather than serving the Lord God, she serves her own earthly 'Lord', her husband. She draws an implicit parallel between the voluntary withdrawal from society experienced by the anchorite and her own enforced exile in the wake of her Royalist doyenne, Henrietta Maria, in 1644. Though she claimed elsewhere in the memoir that exile exacerbated her ill-health, here at its conclusion, she embraces her seclusion in line with her authorial persona as a singular melancholic

[6] For more, see Sharon Cadman Seelig, *Autobiography and Gender in Early Modern Literature: Reading Women's Lives, 1600– 1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 8.
[7] Sheila Ottway, 'Autobiography' in Anita Pacheco, ed., *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 231– 248 (p. 240).

woman. Rather than a tale of spiritual awakening (such as Lucy Hutchinson's autobiography (c. 1675), which serves to highlight 'so many special indulgencies […] they being all of them to be regarded as talents intrusted to my improovement for God's glory'), one might interpret Cavendish's 'True Relation' as a plotting of her intellectual awakening, her growing confidence in the development of her ideas and, most pertinently, her willingness to share them.[8] Unlike her fictional work, Cavendish's own memoir is comparatively well-structured, tracing her character development in a way that might anticipate the Bildungsroman. Stephen Clucas has identified Cavendish as 'the first Englishwoman to fashion herself as an author'; she is not only an author or a producer of texts, she also produces and choreographs her persona along with it.[9] Her memoir is undoubtedly at the crux of this exhibition; in her resolve to publish it, Cavendish conveys a pride, even an arrogance, that her existence and her voice – detached from the God of the conversion narrative – might be worth remembering.

Her 'True Relation' does not conclude with an epic denouement of her renewed life with God, nor does it look to document her closing years (after all, Cavendish was only 33 years old when she chose to publish it). Instead, the narrative culminates in something entirely opposite, a fear of such a closure or withdrawal,

[8] Lucy Hutchinson, *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson… to Which is Prefixed The Life of Mrs Hutchinson, Written by Herself, a Fragment* (London, 1806), p. 2.

[9] Stephen Clucas, 'Introduction', in Stephen Clucas, ed., *A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2003), p. 1.

> [F]or my Lord having two Wives, I might easily have been mistaken, especially if I should dye, and my Lord Marry again. (*NP,* 391)

It would seem that she feared being lost into posterity; she feared being indistinguishable as an individual. She is anxious to be remembered as more than only as an accessory to her husband. The extract has echoes of the mother's legacy tradition ('some censuring Readers will say, why hath this Ladie writ her own Life? Since none cares to know whose daughter she was, or whose wife she is' (*NP,* 390)), a narrative that typically provided religious counsel in the form of deathbed advice from the maternal narrative voice to her would-be children.[10] Cavendish's iteration again eschews any spiritual connotations; she writes here *because* she has no heirs and, fearing that her legacy might be consequently erased by history, because she wants to be remembered all the same. Again, she makes known her seemingly unfeminine ambition: she could, and perhaps should, hide away and retreat, but she actively chooses not to. The 'True Relation' thus serves as a telling piece of propaganda, a self-consciously public discourse that sews genial melancholy into the very fabric of her existence from childhood, in the hope that her name and reputation will not be forgotten.

ii. Cavendish's Readership and Reputation

[10] For more, see Jennifer Heller, *The Mother's Legacy in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 2011).

How successful was she in her efforts? Though the extent of Cavendish's critical heritage will be discussed more fully in chapter seven, the breadth of her readership and the nature of their support for her writing endeavour provides an important context for the following chapters which look to illustrate the extent of her ambition and departure from convention. Indeed, her readers' appreciation of her writing was vital for the endorsement of her melancholic *habitus*. However, as has been discussed, Cavendish's experience of melancholy, when compared to other later literary women such as Anne Finch, Countess of Winchelsea, or Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, has been interpreted as precarious and peripheral. Though it plays a foundational role in the crafting of her authorial persona, it manifests itself as such – an undercurrent, rather than a focal point. Melancholy is presented as the catalyst of her writing, rather than its subject. Added to this, Cavendish's work has not been received with the same respect or gravity as her female counterparts; her most explicit poem on the condition, 'Dialogue between Melancholy and Mirth' (in her first publication, *Poems and Fancies*), might anticipate Finch's 'The Spleen' in its detail and rigour,

> She'll make you start at every noise you hear,
> And visions strange shall in your eyes appear;
> Your stomach cold and raw, digesting naught,
> Your liver dry, your heart with sorrow fraught; (*PF,* 77)

Still, the power of Cavendish's account was no doubt mitigated by her provocative antics elsewhere, both on and off the page. Her idiosyncratic philosophy and hermaphroditic dress fashioned a caricature more easily side– lined than taken seriously.

Indeed, in 1925, Virginia Woolf observed that Cavendish's works were little but 'moulder in the gloom of public libraries'.[11] The curious student 'quails before the mass of her mausoleum, peers in, looks about him, and hurries out again, shutting the door', intimidated, it would seem, by the prolific and diverse material found there.[12] It would take another sixty years for her work to feature in university syllabi; both Helen Wilcox and Louise Stewart have discussed their difficulty in establishing a course on women's writing of which Cavendish's work was a key component.[13] Indeed, though she was not entirely unknown in the twentieth century, Douglas Grant's 1957 biography, *Margaret the First,* did little to recover the reputation of her work as anything more than 'unbearably dull', 'confused ridiculous fantasy'.[14] Wilcox and Stewart's essay discusses how a seminar delivered in 1983, 'limited and perplexed though it was, had helped to set Margaret Cavendish on the way to equivalence with Caesar and Ovid, at least in respect of rescue from anonymity', confirming that Cavendish's role in women's literary history had, before then, been neglected.[15] At its conclusion, the essay acknowledges a promisingly 'rapid' increase in the study of 'women writers courses, and feminist critical approaches'.[16] Despite this, however, Cavendish's works are still to be consolidated in a critical edition. Though some select texts, *The Blazing World* and *Sociable Letters* for

11 Woolf, *The Common Reader,* p. 98

12 Ibid.

13 Louise Stewart and Helen Wilcox, 'Why hath this Lady writ her own Life?': studying early female autobiography'' in Ann Thompson and Helen Wilcox, eds., *Teaching Women: Feminism and English Studies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), pp. 61– 74 (p. 69).

14 Grant, *Margaret the First,* p. 208.

15 Ibid.

16 Stewart and Wilcox, 'Why hath this Lady writ her own Life?', p. 70.

example, have been reproduced several times within the last fifty years alone, one could argue that they do not accurately reflect the breadth of Cavendish's oeuvre. As Woolf herself suggested, such selectivity does little justice to the extensive, if erratic, scope of the author, decanting her abundant philosophies into 'tiny thimbles which hold six drops of their profusion'.[17]

The ambivalent nature of Cavendish's reputation can be efficiently deduced from material copies of her texts themselves; readers' markings, from more formal signatures and annotations to informal doodles and ink– smudged scribbles suggest that her work was – at least before Woolf's observations in 1920s – perused and studied by an intriguingly varied audience. One such text is a first edition copy of *The World's Olio* (1655), owned at one time by the antiquarian and book– collector, Francis Douce (1757– 1834), whose signature and coat of arms appear on the opening pastedown.[18] Alongside his name is ''16', which presumably abbreviates 1816, the likely date of Douce's acquisition of the text. Above his signature, a snippet of paper has been inserted in a similar hand, though this time with red rather than black ink. This paper transcribes a paraphrase from Charles Lamb's *Essays of Elia* (1823): 'Of the Life of the Duke Newcastle by his Duchess it was said, 'no casket is rich enough for such a jewel''.[19] One cannot prove that the two items are related or that the quotation was written or

[17] Woolf, *The Common Reader,* p. 98.

[18] Margaret Cavendish, *The World's Olio* (London, 1655), fol. front pastedown – Bodleian Library, shelfmark Douce C subt. 16. Douce bequeathed this text, along with the second editions of *Poems and Phancies* (1664) and *Natures Pictures* (1671) to the Bodleian library, along with three texts by William Cavendish.

[19] Charles Lamb, *Essays of Elia* (London: Edward Moxon, 1823), p. 191.

inserted by Douce (though Lamb's essays were available during Douce's lifetime), but its inclusion suggests that the owner of the text not only read Cavendish's work, but also took a keen interest in the scholarship surrounding her.

Above the paraphrase is another pasted piece of paper, this time cut from an auction catalogue. The snippet, pasted in the front of *The World's Olio*, strangely describes a different Cavendish text:

> 11256 Newcastle's (Duchess of) Philosophical and Physical Opinions, *from Waller the poet's library*, folio, *neat,* 1 *l.* 1s. 1663

The 'Waller' reference most likely refers to the library of Edmund Waller (1606– 1687), a poet, politician and friend of Newcastle who frequently dined with the family in Paris.[20] Despite this, his support of Cavendish might not be as straight– forward as it seems. Of Cavendish's 1653 poem 'The Hunting of the Stag', which metaphorises the betrayal of Charles I, Waller is said to have claimed that 'he would have given all his own Poems to have been the Author of that which my Lady Newcastle writ'.[21] This quotation is, however, taken from a letter between Katherine Philips and Sir Charles Cotterell (published in *Orinda to Poliarchus*, 1702) in which Philips recalls that Waller was 'tax'd for [the] Insincerity' of his statement, his support driven more by 'Gallantry […] to save

20 Waller's copy of *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* is, as John Rogers identifies, now held in the Huntington Library with the shelfmark, 12o. 156 (John Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry and Politics in the Age of Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 210n).

21 Katherine Philips, *Katherine Philips (1631/2– 1664): Printed Letters 1697– 1729,* eds. by Betty Travitsky and Anne Lake Prescott, Volume 3 (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 206.

the Reputation of a Lady, and keep her from the Disgrace of having written any thing so ill'.[22] Indeed, Waller's friendship with Newcastle afforded a mass of significant intellectual connections through the 'Cavendish Circle'. He was also patronised by Newcastle's cousin– in– law, Christiana Cavendish, Countess of Devonshire. It is likely, then, that he did not purchase the text himself, but received a gift copy directly from the Duchess, as she was inclined to do for members of the literari that surrounded the family. Thus, his lack of support for her work might have had drastic implications for his own career under the patronage of one of her family members.

It is possible that Douce included the auction catalogue extract as evidence of his collecting habit. He evidently saw Cavendish as a valid and desirable addition to his personal library – the reference to Waller testified to her contemporary relevance and added an intimation of provenance which was likely of great interest to a bibliophile. Still, the reference to Cavendish's *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* remains intriguing; the text that was not part of the collection that Douce bequeathed to the Bodleian – did he fail to acquire it at auction and decide to include the cut– out as an indication of his interest? Similarly, the quotation from Lamb is strangely at odds with the text it is found in: the paraphrase is taken from Lamb's praise of Cavendish's *Life of William,* not *The World's Olio.* These two scrap entries, glued to the inside cover, suggest an owner who was keen to convey their knowledge of Cavendish's wider oeuvre as well as the critical reception of these texts by other admiring readers. In contrast, the inside of the text suggests an altogether different reader, who chose to doodle crowns and crowned busts

[22] Ibid.

in pencil and ink on the frontispiece and closing flyleaf.[23] Amongst these are seven separate lists of numbers which, on closer inspection, appear to be sums of pounds, shillings and pence. One might presume that these calculations and sketches are not by Douce, not only as they are in a different mahogany coloured ink, but also because it is difficult to imagine that a book– collector would deface his own collection. Indeed, the markings suggest a more indifferent attitude to Cavendish's work, the doodles and sums across its blank pages convey a tangible apathy – the text is not a cherished possession (as it might have been for Douce), but an alternative scrapbook used for day– to– day scrawls.

The Bodleian also holds a copy of Cavendish's *Philosophical Fancies* (1653), the companion piece to her first publication, *Poems and Fancies,* published the same year. Again, the annotations to this text reveal a different calibre of reader. On the opening flyleaf appears the following Latin inscription:

> Lib. T. B. ex dono Illustrissima
> Heroine Nouv– castrensis
> Marchionossæ. Jun. 3.
> CIↃ. IↃC. LIII.[24]

[23] Cavendish, *The World's Olio* (London, 1655), fol. recto of back flyleaf.

[24] Cavendish, *Philosophical Fancies* (London, 1653), fol. verso of front flyleaf – Bodleian Library, shelfmark 8° N 2 Art. BS.

This suggests that the text had been gifted ('ex dono') to the original owner by Cavendish herself and is likely one of many she gave to 'the two universities', Oxford and Cambridge. The date recorded at the bottom of this inscription – 'CIↃ', an old formation of the roman numeral 'M', 'IↃC' meaning 'DC' – tallies to 1653, the same year in which the text was first published, which would suggest that this inscription was produced by one of the text's first readers. Her title 'Nouv– castrensis' is transcribed differently to how it now appears on the family tombstone at Westminster Abbey, 'Novo castro'. The 'Orbis Latinus' database lists a number of variations on the spelling of Newcastle throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including 'Novicastrum' and 'Neocastrum': though 'Nouv– castrensis' is not included, it is likely another idiosyncratic spelling used by the text's learned reader.[25]

A small note on the facing page, the title page of the text, might help to identify the reader. In the top right– hand corner, written in the same ink, is what appears to be the Greek phrase, 'αἰὲν ἀριστεύειν' ('*aien aristeuein*'). When translated, this reads 'Always be the best', a phrase that first appears in Homer's *Iliad* as a charge given to Achilles denoting a tireless need to strive for excellence.[26] One might therefore imagine this reader as an educated student in Latin and Greek, encountering the philosophical work of an uneducated writer (and a woman), and choosing to annotate it with a derisive display of learning in languages that this writer would not, by virtue of her sex,

[25] I am indebted to Professor Sarah Knight at the University of Leicester for her help in translating this inscription.

[26] I am indebted to Dr Nicholas Hardy, Fellow at Birmingham University, for his help in translating this phrase from Greek and for his research on the use of this phrase in the work of Thomas Barlow.

have had the ability nor opportunity to learn. Another explanation is that the text once belonged to Thomas Barlow (1609– 1691), Provost of Queen's College, Oxford, and Bishop of Lincoln, who annotated many texts from his own collection with the same Greek phrase. Moreover, Barlow wrote to Cavendish throughout her life, thanking her for gifting copies of her text to the university. In a 1656 letter, he writes:

> I inscribed every Book before I gave it to the respective Colledges, with such an Inscription as Posterity might know who was their Benefactor. For instance, that to *Magdalene* Colledge, thus,
>
> *… Liber Collegii Divae Magdalenae, ex Dono Illustrissimae Heroinae Margaretae Novo– Castrensis Marchionissae, Authoris.*[27]

This inscription bears a striking similarity to that found in the 1653 copy of *Philosophical Fancies*. In Barlow's letters – of which four survive in Cavendish's posthumous commemorative volume *Letters and Poems in honour of the Illustrious Princess* – he reveals an obsequious appreciation of her gift: 'I shall not call your Excellencies Books an addition to our private Library […], they being (like their Illustrious Author) a far greater Library of Arts and Ingenuity. Sure I am, even Bodlies Library cannot boast of any such Donation, since King *James* sent his Royal Works'.[28] Indeed, in 1656, Barlow writes admiringly of an anonymous contemporary treatise,

[27] *Letters and Poems in Honour of the Incomparable Princess, Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle* (London, 1676), p. 66.

[28] *Letters and Poems*, p. 68– 9.

'*Womens Worth, or a Treatise proving by sundry reasons that Women excel Men*' of which Cavendish 'may prove the best Argument in the World to convince them of their infidelity'.[29] Barlow's encomia are typical of the letters included in the posthumous volume (cherry-picked for their praise of Cavendish) and so might be easily read as a response to her noble status, rather than a genuine admiration of her work. This could go some way to explaining Cavendish's polarised reputation during her own lifetime: were those who publicly praised her work doing so for the connections her nobility afforded?

Taken together, the evidence presented in these annotated copies counters Woolf's assessment of Cavendish's literary reputation, at least until the mid– nineteenth century. The texts reveal a varied audience: an admiring bibliophile, who presumably cherished the folio; an apathetic reader, who defaces the text with scribbled mundanities; and an educated academic at Oxford University, who receives her work with obsequious praise. It is clear, then, that Cavendish *was* being read, but was not universally appreciated. Chapter two will now consider the authorial self-image that she presented to such readers, the extraordinary ambition of which proved particularly divisive.

[29] *Letters and Poems*, p. 69.

Chapter Two

Worlds and Nothings: Cavendish and the Female Imagination

i. The Mind and the Microscope: Cavendish's Creative Ambition

Cavendish's first publication, *Poems and Fancies,* is considered in-depth in this chapter. The text is a 214-page melting pot, deliberating various themes and only roughly divided into quarters by four lyrical 'Claspes' with an adjoining petition to the intended reader of the section to come – moral philosophers, poets, writing women and soldiers. The breadth of the audience Cavendish summons is testimony to the ambition of her work, though it ultimately brought accusations of ineptitude and madness. This tension between ambition and insanity most accurately encapsulates Cavendish's legacy; her readers have repeatedly recognised either her resolve or her foolishness in entering the literary marketplace. Woolf is the first to plot a spectrum between the two. Though her resounding comment remains her damning image of Cavendish as a 'giant cucumber [which] spread itself over all the roses', elsewhere, Woolf had shown a far more nuanced appreciation of Cavendish's method:

> One cannot help following the lure of her erratic and lovable personality as it meanders and twinkles through page after page. There is something noble and Quixotic and high-spirited, as well as crack-brained and bird-witted about her.[1]

[1] Woolf, *The Common Reader,* p. 108.

Here, ambition and insanity are brought together in the 'troubled creative' paradigm. And as a fellow women writer who experienced mental illness, Woolf provides a useful critical lens through which this can be identified. For Woolf, as for Cavendish's readers, the Duchess teeters on the brink of the fantastic, between genial sensibility and capricious folly.

This study will follow and develop Woolf's view in arguing that Cavendish resolves the tension between ambition and insanity in the *habitus* of the melancholic genius: the guise of melancholic 'madness' allowed access to a tradition of genius that could satisfy her ambition to succeed. Thus, Cavendish was not the passive subject of the 'Mad Madge' myth, but an active partaker in its establishment. Within the last twenty years, Cavendish scholars like Anna Battigelli have begun to acknowledge the Duchess' cognisance in the shaping of her provocative authorial identity,

> The very characteristics that have caused scholars to dismiss Cavendish – her lack of method, her willingness to embrace contradictions, her confidence in deductive thinking, her eccentricity and self-absorption – [are] historically significant.[2]

Cavendish's work reveals a 'thinking life aware of its role as a thinking life'.[3] Accordingly, then, one must recognise her acute awareness of her readership and,

[2] Battigelli, *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind,* p. 10.

[3] Ibid.

necessarily, of the 'self' she projects to these readers. It is telling that, across her oeuvre, her poetic thoughts replicate the fizzing of a mind brimming with ideas, while her philosophical texts, not without her characteristic wit and erraticism, pretend to the more sober, controlled style of authoritative tomes. Cavendish is careful to present a different aspect of her(self) appropriate to her readership. As will be discussed in this chapter, the periphrastic and unwieldy structure of texts such as *Poems and Fancies* – and later, *The World's Olio* (1655), which as the name would suggest (olio meaning hotchpotch, medley, jumble) shares the same miscellaneous format – are therefore purposeful and form an essential part of her creative manifesto.

This chapter will begin to dismantle the tenets of this manifesto, by first deconstructing Cavendish's self-fashioning as a creator and the ways in which she defined creativity. Indeed, as the form of her texts suggest, creativity is, to her, inherently crude, natural and fundamentally feminine and so subject to the same changeability and chaos that she saw in the wider universe (the work of 'Nature' whom she imagines as a woman). This chapter will discuss Cavendish's creative ambition and the construction of her authorial persona that relied so heavily on a singular subjectivity – the creation of a world of her own imagining. It will also explore the significance of gender in Cavendish's construction of her textual 'self', looking in particular at the ways in which the peculiarities of the female mind and its 'Fantastical' motions were thought to contribute to her work (*PF,* sig. A3r). One must determine how Cavendish sought to negotiate the vexed position of the female author, which as Catherine Belsey suggests, could only meaningfully take shape as a 'discontinuous identity',

> While the autonomous subject […] was in the making, women had no single or stable place from which to define themselves as independent beings. In this sense they both were and were not subjects.[4]

Not only did Cavendish have to establish herself as a legitimate author, but she had to do so against a tide of patriarchal disapproval that had previously stifled the public sounding of feminine subjectivity. How, then, did she fashion herself to resist and/or elude such censure, to 'rhetorically recast [her] riven subjectivity' as both being and non-being, world and nothing?[5]

In the prologue to her first publication, Cavendish's words anticipate the instability that Catherine Belsey later identified in literary, and especially dramatic, depictions of the Renaissance woman:

> But my desire that [my Atomes] should please the Readers, is as big as the World they make; and my Feares are of the same bulk; yet my Hopes fall to a single Atome agen: and so shall I remaine an unsettled Atome, or a confus'd heape, till I heare my Censure. If I be prais'd, it fixes them; but if I am condemn'd, I shall be Annihilated to nothing: but my Ambition is such, as I would either be a World, or nothing. (*PF,* sig. A6r)

[4] Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 149– 50.

[5] Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 287.

The Duchess' selfhood, at least how it is recast in the 'I' of this extract, rests on the ultimate either/or scenario: between completion or annihilation, she will be a 'World, or nothing'. Here, Cavendish's pretensions to modesty buckle under the weight of her fierce ambition. The self-deprecatory mode, in which she waits to 'heare [her] Censure', though typical of the modesty topoi found in paratextual material of the age, is strangely underpinned by a bold streak of resilience tantamount of martyrdom. Instead of succumbing to her discontinuous identity, Cavendish appears to invite such polarity. As Sandra Sherman notes, by positing herself as a 'World, or nothing', Cavendish promotes 'an aesthetic of englobement' in which 'she instantiates herself in writing about herself writing'.[6] She creates in her text 'a world of her own imagining' in which the 'I' is entirely self-sufficient – it is its own authority.[7] And yet, the extract encapsulates the problem that this defiance posed for the woman writer: there is a conflict between the audacious independence of the singular 'I' and Cavendish's appeal for the judgment of her readers, however feigned it may be.

Tina Krontiris has commented on the use and misuse of the modesty topos in the work of early modern women; that most 'include in the dedication or preface of their work an apology which recognises, at least for the sake of appearance, the inferiority of

6 Sandra Sherman, 'Trembling Texts: Margaret Cavendish and the Dialectic of Authorship', *English Literature Renaissance,* 24, 1 (1994), pp. 184–210, (p. 184).

7 Ibid.

the work on account of the author's sex'.[8] Despite her claims for singular subjectivity, Cavendish cannot avoid entirely the modesty that was expected of her as a woman. The stability of her authorial identity is thus undone by the essential instability of her gender. Consequently, amid a sentence of worlds and nothings, she is a something – 'an unsettled Atome, or a confus'd heape' – her self-fashioning rooted in a dialectic of conformity to and rebellion against convention. It is telling, then, that the images that Cavendish uses to describe her self in this prefatory extract echo those used in Joshua Sylvester's translation of Du Bartas' *Divine Weeks and Works* (1605), describing chaos in the beginning:

> That first World (yet) was a most formeless Forme,
> A confus'd Heape, a *Chaos* most diforme,
> A Gulphe of Gulphes, a Body ill compact,
> An ugly medly, where all difference lackt:
> Where th' Elements lay jumbled all together,
> Where hot and colde were jarring each with either;
> The blunt with sharpe; the danke against the drie,
> The hard with soft, the base against the high;
> Bitter with sweet: and while this brawle did laste,
> The Earth in Heav'n, the Heavn in Earth was plaste: [9]

[8] Tina Krontiris, *Oppositional Voices: Women as Writers and Translators of Literature in the English Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 21. See also, Patricia Pender, *Early Modern Women's Writing and the Rhetoric of Modesty* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[9] Joshua Sylvester, *The Divine Weeks and Works of Guillaume de Saluste, Sieur du Bartas,* ed. by Susan Snyder, Volume 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 118.

The poem, relating the biblical history of the world, was amongst many verse translations to which a young Margaret had access, and the text clearly influenced her later writing.[10] Plucking the image of the 'confus'd Heape' from Sylvester's text, Cavendish likens her self to a world in its chaotic, pre-natal condition (here, 'her self' is differentiated from 'herself' as the former denotes the textual persona manifested through her discourse). Cavendish's authorial self relishes the liminal status afforded by such chaos as a world that may yet be formless, but has potential.

Her use of 'confus'd heape', when traced back to Du Bartas' text, recalls an image in which opposites clash in a flurry of contradictions, 'blunt with sharpe…bitter with sweet'. This is then yoked to another image, this time from her own cosmology – she is '*an unsettled Atome,* or a confus'd heape' (emphasis mine). The composition of the microcosmic self she describes here reflects her wider belief in the macrocosmic structure of the universe: the extract prefaces a work in which philosophy and poetry collide to portray a cosmos compelled by the motion of atoms – 'Motion directs, while Atoms dance', she writes (*PF,* 17). According to Cavendish, then, being an 'unsettled' atom is no bad thing; collision and contradiction are just as much a part of her interpretation of the world around her as are harmony and synchronisation. In this way, her philosophy echoes a broader early modern fashion for Lucretius, whose *De Rerum*

[10] Whitaker, *Mad Madge,* p. 20– 1.

Natura – as it is here translated by Cavendish's contemporary, Lucy Hutchinson – reveals a similar emphasis on atoms, motion and collision:[11]

> Armies of attoms sport in those bright beames,
> And meeting in perpetuall skirmishies,
> Here joyne, there part, their motions neuer cease[.][12]

While, for Du Bartas, such 'skirmishes' characterise the 'ugly medly' of chaos, for Lucretius, they are at the heart of creation, where matter joins and parts. Combining the two images together, 'an unsettled Atom, or a confus'd heape', Cavendish seeks to defend her ambivalent persona and her abstruse writing method, by which poems are placed in an unlikely sequence and dance between discussions of nature, war and myth. Both replicate auspicious chaos. Presenting her own hypothesis to her elders, 'The Natural Philosophers', the prefatory letter uses an image that, on first reading, conveys an appropriate level of decorum and feminine self-effacement: she is adrift in an anarchic limbo awaiting their censure. And yet, given her allusions both to Du Bartas' text and her own atomistic theories, there is couched an altogether different reading in which Cavendish takes ownership of her 'chaotic' style as the true locus of creativity.

11 Emma L. E. Rees discusses this point in her chapter on 'Lucretian Resonance' in *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Genre, Exile* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 54– 79.

12 Lucy Hutchinson, *The Works of Lucy Hutchinson: Volume 1 Translation of Lucretius,* eds. by Reid Barbour and David Norbrook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 91.

Three years before the publication of Cavendish's text, Anne Bradstreet's *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America* (1650), though apparently published without her knowledge, had tackled equally weighty matters of philosophy and science with deference to gender conventions. In her poem, 'Of the Four Humours of Mans Constitution', Bradstreet apostrophises the humour, Flegme, as a female speaker:

> Some other parts there issue from the Brain,
> Whose use and worth to tel, I must refrain;
> Some worthy learned *Crooke* may these reveal,
> But modesty hath charg'd me to conceal
> Here's my epitome of Excellence:
> For what's the Brains is mine by Consequence.[13]

Here, Flegme remains 'the silentest of all the four', though her reluctance to speak is more a matter of self-effacement than shyness: her 'wisdow spake not much, but thought the more'.[14] When discussing what she knows of the brain, then, she alludes to knowledge that she cannot, or rather must not, share. The privilege of expression is instead left for 'Crooke', celebrated English anatomist, Helkiah Crooke (1576 – 1648), author of *Microcosmographia: A Description of the Body of Man* (1615) from which Bradstreet's poem borrows much of its material.[15] Thus, Cavendish was not the only

[13] Anne Bradstreet, *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America or Severall Poems, Compiled with Great Variety of Wit and Learning, Full of Delight* (London, 1650), p. 39.

[14] Bradstreet, *The Tenth Muse,* p. 23.

[15] For more, see Tamara Harvey, *Figuring Modesty in Feminist Discourse Across the Americas, 1633– 1700* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 1– 2.

woman to toy with the modesty topoi of the era. However, while she was suitably, if ironically, self-effacing like Bradstreet, she was markedly reluctant to 'conceal' or 'refrain' from sharing her ideas. The then-marchioness deliberately flouts what Patricia Pender has labelled, in her study on the rhetoric of modesty, the 'inexpressibility' topos.[16] To demonstrate this 'standard feature' of early modern women's writing, Pender cites the poetry of Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke (1561 – 1621), and specifically Sidney's encomia to Queen Elizabeth I in which her muse is unable to portray the subject accurately: 'But soft my muse, Thy pitch is earthly lowe'.[17] Here, Sidney is doubly removed from the creative process, her inexpressibility twofold: her thoughts are supplied via a muse, who is, in turn, incapable of worthy expression. Of course, the hyperbolic deference of Sidney's poem would have been directed by the royalty of its subject, but the residual effect of this technique was still evident around a half-century later. In Bradstreet's poem, the female speaker is impelled to restrain herself from saying too much. Cavendish, on the other hand, does not pretend to inarticulacy; at the heart of her writing strategy is a garrulous compulsion to write, even to the detriment of its clarity. At the end of *Poems and Fancies*, Cavendish acknowledges and attempts to justify the idiosyncratic nature of her work: 'I found it difficult, to get so many *Rhythmes*, as to joyn the *sense* of the *Subject*' (*PF,* 212). Her priority is not refinement or even lucidity, but instead to use her poetry as 'a proper vehicle for her imaginative creativity', noting 'I chose to leave the *Elegance* of *words,* then to *obstruct* the *sense* of the matter' (*PF,* 212).[18] Cavendish readily abandons the tenets of modest

[16] Pender, *Early Modern Women's Writing,* p. 100.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Rees, *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Genre, Exile,* p. 63.

expression; her work is necessarily chaotic as it is born out of a mind that deals 'not so much in *Numbers, Words,* and *Phrase',* but raw, uncultivated 'Fancy' *(PF,* 212).

The notion that productivity and innovation could spring from chaos was no doubt comforting for a Royalist who had fled war and regicide. It is interesting, then, that Battigelli interprets Cavendish's philosophy as confirmation of her identity as a misunderstood 'modern thinker'. Her interest in the 'flux and fluidity of conscious experience' is apparently 'strikingly modern'.[19] Just how modern, Battigelli does not say. Cavendish's championing of flux at the core of subjectivity and, moreover, female subjectivity may seem progressive in its scope. If 'our modern notion of the self is related to […] a certain sense of inwardness', then, her profound awareness of the 'inner depths' of selfhood, with its 'partly unexplored and dark interiors', might endorse her as a philosophical pioneer.[20] Yet, her 'primary interest' in the 'nature of the human mind' and its subjective, creative imagination actually railed against a burgeoning seventeenth-century scientific movement that prioritised the apparently objective eye.

The century witnessed the rise of Experimentalism, the search for empirical evidence of things 'discovered rather than invented'.[21] In light of this, despite her belief in Cavendish's otherwise 'modern' philosophy, Battigelli maintains that her habit for analogising and metaphorising – as she does with atoms and chaos in the extract above –

[19] Battigelli, *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind,* p. 114.

[20] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 111.

[21] Quoted in Battigelli, *Exiles of the Mind*, p. 103.

was 'being overthrown as archaic even in her day'.[22] For the Experimentalists, analogies were no match for empirical proof. Yet, throughout her oeuvre, Cavendish conveys a dissatisfaction with the 'brittle Art' of microscopy: the microscope presents no more than 'the exterior Parts of the Object' and misleads the viewer, 'the more the figure by Art is magnified, the more it appears mis-shapen from the natural' – a knife that might appear blunt under the lens will still be able to cut (*OUEP,* 9). In place of the study of the external world, she posits the study of the mind: 'the Brain is like a Perspective-glass, and the Understanding is the Eye' (*TWO,* 100). Thus, her philosophy was not altogether new or 'modern', but its own composite of existing ideas presented in an eccentric and outmoded way. Moreover, her public iteration of it during the English Interregnum proved a provocative political exercise. With the ultimate structure of power, the monarchy, vanquished, her theory of chaos attempts to elucidate her own consequently precarious socio-political situation. Most intriguingly, it encourages her to negotiate her position in relation to those same power structures that held back women. The imagination provided an alternative laboratory in which such issues could be tried and tested. Though Cavendish's preoccupation with interiority may appear 'modern' in hindsight, her reactionary discourse, despite its subversiveness, was rather very much of its time.

Indeed, her paradoxical association of chaos and creativity, worlds and nothings, taps into contemporary theological debates on the exact nature of the creation itself: was the universe assembled from chaos or created *ex nihilo*? It would appear that Du

[22] Battigelli, *Exiles of the Mind,* p. 114.

Bartas favoured the former, his lines filled with images of disunity and deficiency. While Cavendish's 'confus'd Heape' similarly calls for order and repletion, the simultaneous opposition of 'World, or nothing' suggests an alternative doctrine. It is clear that during the production of her first text Cavendish was negotiating her role in the act of creation as either a compiler of chaos or maverick creator. The issue remained throughout her career: in 1666, her fourteenth publication, *The Blazing World,* provided an opportunity to realise the world she had imagined. However, the freedom of thought and expression that the text's utopian genre allowed meant that, as a woman, Cavendish would have to explain and defend her eccentric method. It is significant, then, that she chooses to do so, not just through her own words, but those of an established *male* poet, her husband, who provides the following prefatory poem:

> Columbus, then for Navigation fam'd,
> Found a new World, America 'tis named;
> Now this new World was found, it was not made,
> Onely discovered, lying in Times shade.
>
> Then what are You, having no Chaos found
> To make a World, or any such least ground?
> But your creating Fancy, thought it fit
> To make your World of Nothing, but pure Wit.
> Your *Blazing-World,* beyond the Stars mounts higher,
> Enlightens all with a Coelestial Fier. (*BW,* sig. A1r)

Cavendish's fictional world, according to Newcastle, is created *ex nihilo*; it is made, not found, it is invented, not discovered. And if Columbus is a discoverer, 'then what are You?', he asks. Unlike Du Bartas' creator, who shapes the world from jumbled matter, Cavendish finds 'no Chaos' from which to fashion her designs. Instead, her creations are summoned from her 'creating Fancy', infusing both her mind and the blank page – her 'World of Nothing' – with 'pure Wit'.

In using her husband's words to validate her venture into the utopian genre, hitherto dominated by male writers like Thomas More and Francis Bacon, Cavendish engages with her 'struggle for discursive authority'.[23] The text's format, attached to her *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy,* mimics Bacon's pairing of his utopian text, *New Atlantis,* with its philosophical counterpart, *Sylva Sylvarum: Or a Naturall Historie* (published posthumously in 1627). While challenging and revising stylistic boundaries, Cavendish also negotiates her position as a woman in a male-dominated literary marketplace and seeks acceptance from her peers there. Newcastle's words serve both of these functions, simultaneously sanctioning Cavendish's project and justifying her innovative method, while also drawing attention to her status as a wife – ironically, her own voice is not deemed sufficient enough to prove her worth. Including this in the preface to her 1666 work, Cavendish makes it apparent that what modesty she shows in 1653 has been abandoned. The imagery of the preface has changed: she is no longer a confused heap or an unsettled atom in need of divine reparation, but is herself imbued with 'Coelestial Fier'. In a quasi-divine act, her 'Blazing-World' is created out of nothing,

[23] Cullen Khanna, 'The Subject of Utopia: Margaret Cavendish and her Blazing World', p. 30.

her mind a *tabula rasa* upon which fancy's expressions impress themselves. However, the challenge of her 'riven subjectivity' remains. Though she abandons the images of confusion, her claims to divine sovereignty are peculiarly undercut by her deference to her husband's words – the chaos at the heart of her selfhood, its dichotomy of conformity and rebellion, persists.

Given this depiction of her self as one with a natural aptitude for the invention of ideas, creating *ex nihilo*, it is perhaps unsurprising that, throughout her career, Cavendish was careful to deny outside influences. The stirrings of this habit are again evident in her first work, *Poems and Fancies.* Her claims to singularity, no matter how unstable, leave no room for a reliance on others for ideas: 'I never read, nor heard of any *English Booke* to Instruct me: and truly I understand no other Language; not French, although I was in France five years: Neither do I understand my owne Native Language very well' (*PF,* sig. A6r). At best, this approach betrays Cavendish's awareness of her gender, at worst, her anxiety about it: that her womanhood might make her less able, or permitted, to grapple with existing literature. Again, the midst of her career brings a revealing change, at least ostensibly. In 'A General Prologue to all my Playes' (1662), as well as in her later scientific works, her 'struggle for discursive authority' becomes more apparent. As her career developed, Cavendish seemed keen to equate herself with established male authors, without jeopardising her self-presentation as an original creator: she compares her work to that of Jonson, Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher in a peculiarly grandiose display of her awareness of the dramatic canon. Thus, while insisting on the distinctiveness of her own ideas, she implicitly aligns herself with authors whose names had been hallowed in folio editions.

Her ostensible praise of these writers is threaded with a telling sarcasm that serves to elevate her naturally inspired, if unpolished, skill above that of her forebears. Ben Jonson is the focus of her critique throughout the prologue and, perhaps, understandably so; in their correspondence, Jonson frequently refers to Newcastle as 'best Patron'.[24] One can imagine, then, that Jonson and his work were frequent topics of conversation in the Cavendish household. Despite this, she casts suspicion on the originality of his ideas, suggesting their indebtedness to other sources: his plays, though wrought 'by wits Invention, and his labouring thoughts', are dependent on his reading of 'several Authors [who] brought much more' (*P,* sig. A7r). Like foreign emperors, his work appears 'Unto [his] subjects, not 'bove once a year', the intermittence of which – despite their 'great worth' – is symptomatic of a slow, almost forced wit (*P,* A7r). Having called into question the authenticity of Jonson's work, Cavendish offers by comparison her own instinctive style:

> But Noble Readers, do not think my Playes,
> Are such as have been writ in former daies;
> As *Johnson, Shakespear, Beamont, Fletcher* writ;
> Mine want their Learning, Reading, Language, Wit:
> […] I could not steal their Wit, nor Plots out take;

[24] A 1631 letter is reproduced in Sara Van Den Berg, 'True Relation: the life and career of Ben Jonson' in Richard Harp and Stanley Stewart, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Ben* Jonson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 1–15 (p. 11). For more, Nick Rowe, ''My Best Patron': William Cavendish and Jonson's Caroline Drama', *The Seventeenth Century* 9.2 (1994), pp. 197– 212.

> All my Playes Plots, my own poor brain did make:
> From Plutarchs story I ne'r took a Plot,
> Nor from Romances, nor from Don Quixot,
> As others have, for to assist their Wit,
> But I upon my own Foundation writ; (*P,* sig. A7v)

In yet another concoction of pseudo-modesty and ambition, her determination to be accepted by, and yet set apart from, the literary tradition is made known. Despite her attempts to convey no anxiety of influence, in this extract in particular, she is almost *too* aware of her influences. The lady doth protest too much.

Indeed, to offer a Bloomian reading, Cavendish's desire to convey herself as, what Bloom would call, a 'strong' poet (creating original volumes despite the pressure of influence) leads her to diminish Jonson's work in an attempt to elevate her own. This technique, dubbed 'daemonisation', involves a 'movement towards a personalised Counter-Sublime, in reaction to the precursor's Sublime'.[25] Jonson is therefore both her inspiration and her 'masculine antitype'.[26] His work upholds the 'principles of unity', the Aristotelian unities of action, place and time, that Cavendish's own work purposely flouts:[27]

[25] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry,* 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 15.
[26] Judith Haber, *Desire and Dramatic Form in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 120.
[27] Ibid.

> I would have my plays to be like the natural course of all things in the world […] some of my scenes have no acquaintance or relation to the rest of the scenes, although in one and the same play, which is the reason many of my plays will not end as others plays do. (*P,* sig. A4r)

Regardless, by aligning herself with Jonson, Cavendish seeks to share his renown; both are equally inspired to write worthy drama, but, while Jonson's wit is almost strained, hers is naturally prolific. While 'sublime' is anachronistic in this context, its essence – to be momentarily reductive – as the meeting of equal and opposed feelings, an intense ambivalence, is very much in tune with Cavendish's philosophy and writing style as the simulation of chaos. Her limited education, as a woman, plays a fundamental role here; her 'want [of] Learning, Reading, Language, Wit' grants freedom from such charges of imitation and theft, allowing her own consummate 'sublime' (*P,* sig. A7v). Her sex proves an asset rather than a weakness that confirms her ability to create *ex nihilo*: 'All the materials in my head did grow/ All is my own, and nothing do I owe' (*P,* sig. A8r).

Perhaps the only exception to Cavendish's sardonic critique is Shakespeare. His 'fluent Wit' and 'less Learning' are diametrically opposed to Jonson, but regardless, she writes, 'full well he writ' (*P,* sig. A7v). If Jonson serves as her antitype throughout the prologue, then Shakespeare is her ally. Indeed, Jonson's own dedication to Shakespeare, published in 1623, had noted his 'small Latin and less Greek', symptoms of his lack of formal education. As Marianne Novy suggests, in the seventeenth century, before he was 'enshrined in the literary canon', Shakespeare had 'a cultural image as an outsider to

many established institutions'.[28] As such, he provides a fitting archetype for Cavendish's own untutored method, bridging the axiological gap between her and Jonson. Regardless of how central singularity was to the fashioning of her authorial persona, then, Cavendish could not help but to engage with other writers to determine her place in the canon. Though early Cavendish scholarship readily accepted her lack of sources as the explanation for her eccentric method, Lara Dodds' 2013 study of *The Literary Invention of Margaret Cavendish* is devoted to the exposition of the Duchess' wider reading. In it, Dodds insists that 'it cannot be true that Cavendish did not read English books'.[29] Indeed, Dodds identifies a double bind that has perpetuated Cavendish's own myth of singularity:

> [The study] of women's literary history has shown how a limited perception for the historical varieties of reading and writing, on the one hand, and a theoretical presumption of women's 'exclusion' and 'silence', on the other, can narrow and distort our understanding of both the quantity and variety of women's literary production in early modern England.[30]

[28] Marianne Novy, 'Introduction: Women's Re– Visions of Shakespeare 1664 – 1988' in Marianne Novy, ed., *Women's Re– visions of Shakespeare: On the Responses of Dickinson, Woolf, Rich, H.D., George Eliot and Others* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), pp. 1–15 (p. 2).

[29] Lara Dodds, *The Literary Invention of Margaret Cavendish* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2013), p. 1.

[30] Dodds, *The Literary Invention,* p. 7.

Margaret Ezell, too, describes a tendency for women to be 'represented as either unique and all-powerful or without individual agency and powerless'.[31]

It would seem that Cavendish, over three centuries earlier, was aware of such a dialectic; she would be 'a World, or nothing'. Her determination to be considered singular, though laced with contradiction and incongruity, drove her creative ambition. If deemed distinct from her peers, her notoriety was assured; she writes:

> I am […] as Ambitious as ever any of my Sex was, is, or can be; which makes, that though I cannot be Henry the Fifth, or Charles the Second, yet I endeavour to be Margaret the First. (*OUEP,* sig. b2r)

Her drive is such that she would align herself with two of England's Kings who, particularly for a Royalist like herself, were worthy of veneration for their bringing order from chaos. The same reverence is, however, unavailable to Cavendish. While her sex prevented her involvement in the political realm, her febrile imagination prevented her engagement with the domestic, so she must, necessarily, turn her abilities inward. Indeed, with no kingdom or subjects to appease, she has only a 'World of Nothing' on which to bestow her wit:

> …although I have neither power, time nor occasion to conquer a world as *Alexander* or *Caesar* did; yet rather than not be mistress of one, since Fortune and

[31] Margaret Ezell, 'The Laughing Tortoise: Speculations on Manuscript Sources and Women's Book History', *English Literary Renaissance* (*ELR*), 38 (2008), pp. 331– 55 (p. 338).

> Fate would give me none, I have made a world of my own: for which no body, I hope, will blame me, since it is in every one's power to do the like. (*OUEP,* sig. b2r)

As a creator, Cavendish might have viewed herself as a wielder or conqueror of chaos, from which she fashioned a world of her own; denied the opportunity to do so in life, her impulse is interiorised and committed to paper and press. Yet, while this world pledged self-sufficiency, it also required legitimacy – what is power unless it is acknowledged and made real by its witnesses? As such, it was not enough for this world to remain just her own, rather it needed to be marketed to, and legitimised by, a wider audience (most of whom were men) without diluting the distinctiveness of her own position as a 'Happy Creatoress' (*BW,* sig. A2r).[32]

ii. Frondeuses and Précieuses: Cavendish's Proto-Feminism

Cavendish's oscillation between rebellion and conformity, her disruptive if not destructive gender politics, has invited questions as to the nature of her supposed proto-feminism. Her contribution to women's studies has long been interpreted as proto-feminist in motivation due to her apparent flouting of the values of modest femininity

[32] My references here move between two editions of 'The Blazing World' as they are presented on *EEBO*: both are published in 1666; the first, attached to the end of *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy* (cited '*OUEP*' – Wing N857) and the other, a separate publication (cited '*BW*' – Wing N849), which includes only the science– fiction prose piece.

upheld by the patriarchal society in which she lived. In the year of Cavendish's death, 1673, Bathsua Makin (whose own extraordinary life is discussed a length in chapter seven) looked back on her impressively prolific writing career and wrote that 'A Learned Woman is thought to be a Comet that forbodes Mischief whenever it appears'.[33] According to Makin, Cavendish's venture into print served to make 'women so high and men so low' that it could 'set the whole world in a flame'.[34] One might presume that – given Makin's tribute – Cavendish was something of a proto-feminist, committed to the social elevation of women through education and learning. All too often, Cavendish's success is interpreted as the triumph of her femininity, when the triumph is, instead, most keenly seen in her singular subjectivity. Though this study will not dwell on the feminist readings of Cavendish's work, it will look to explore Cavendish's re-evaluation of womanhood and so its stance on the question of the Duchess' feminism should be made clear.

Indeed, Cavendish's view of womanhood is less revolutionary than conservative; the same hand that challenged the notion that 'Liberty makes all Women Wild and Wanton', advocating for their access to learning, also notes that women are 'children', their 'Husbands are Nurses; for all Nurses tend Children' (*O,* 223; *TWO,* 77). For every proto-feminist ideological premise in Cavendish's writings, there is an equal and opposite misogynist homily; such is the nature of her work and, it would seem, her

[33] Bathsua Makin, *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen, in Religion, Manners, Arts & Tongues. With an Answer to the Objections against this Way of Education* (London, 1673), sig. A2r. A copy of this text is held at the British Library shelfmark General Reference Collection 1031. G. 19.
[34] Ibid.

mind, fuelled by contradiction and committed to paper and press with its dizzying opinions unresolved, in an almost impenetrable state of flux. Catherine Gallagher's 1988 essay on the Duchess, 'Embracing the Absolute: The Politics of the Female Subject in Seventeenth-Century England', was one of the first to register the vexed feminism in Cavendish's discourse, a feminism ultimately restrained by her 'Toryism' and Filmerian ideology (the philosophy of Robert Filmer (1588 – 1653) defended the divine right of kings).[35] Cavendish may have highlighted and critiqued the institutionalised patriarchy of her time, but she mounts no sustained challenge to it. As Lisa Sarasohn has suggested, 'Cavendish certainly was not a feminist if feminist is taken to mean the empowering of all women'.[36] Indeed, the most prevalent and singular exception to the supposed 'natural' gender hierarchy propounded in her work was herself. As such, Sara Mendelson has proposed a distinction that one should heed when approaching the Duchess' work: she is no feminist, but 'an egoist who happened to be of the female gender'.[37]

This study, in discussing 'womanhood' in the Duchess' work, will share Mendelson's stance and look to deconstruct and ultimately resolve the collision of egoist and proto-feminist motifs in her work. Cavendish's position on women, particularly her dalliance with the *querelle des femmes*, necessitated an audacious remodelling of womanhood – or more broadly, of gender – in order to permit her own oscillation

35 Catherine Gallagher, 'Embracing the Absolute: The Politics of the Female Subject in Seventeenth–Century England', *Genders,* 1 (1988), pp. 24–39 (p. 33).

36 Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish,* p. 191.

37 Sara Mendelson, *The Mental World of Stuart Women* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), p. 55.

between conformity and sedition. The most frequently cited example of this is her visit to the Royal Society in May 1667. Cavendish was the first woman to be invited to observe experiments there; a visit she made in typically provocative style wearing a flamboyant frock carried by six handmaids, cavalier's boots and hat, and preferring to bow than to curtsy.[38] Not only did she straddle the threshold between the public and private, the untutored and the learned, Cavendish's visit to the Society enacted a choreographed display of her amended gender. She straddled male/female binaries as the female cavalier.

In visiting the society, a bastion of learning, Cavendish makes a claim for herself as a worthy attendant, a learned woman. In doing so, she is, as Margaret L. King writes, 'like divine miracles, […] both wondrous and terrible; as [a prodigy, she] had exceeded – and violated – nature. Male by intellect, female in body and in soul, [her] sexual identity was rendered ambiguous'.[39] According to Sarasohn's seminal study of Cavendish, the Duchess' gender-bending was informed by the 'performative' culture in which she operated. Quoting Rebecca De Monté's essay ''Making a Spectacle': Margaret Cavendish and the Staging of the Self', Sarasohn explains how Cavendish exemplifies 'the idea of staging the self or recreating oneself through performance […] that was endemic to seventeenth-century culture, a period when bodies 'made a display of themselves''.[40] In her original essay, De Monté's remarks are evidenced with reference to the fictionalised

[38] Grant, *Margaret the First,* p. 184

[39] Margaret L. King, 'Book– Lined Cells: Women and Humanism in the Early Italian Renaissance' in Patricia H. Labalme, ed., *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women in the European Past* (New York: New York University Press, 1980), pp. 66–90 (p. 75).

[40] Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish,* p. 25.

performances *within* Cavendish's work, particularly through her dramatic heroines. Sarasohn's adaptation of the idea, on the other hand, cites Cavendish's choreographed literal 'performances', such as her contentious visit to the Royal Society. In fact, the two mutually inform one another. Throughout her oeuvre and in these strategised public appearances, Cavendish actively embraces a hermaphroditic persona, assuming the role of a pseudo-male, not the triumphant female of proto-feminism. Her assumption of traditionally male roles was not reserved to the page, then, where she defiantly and repeatedly asserted ownership of her ideas. How, then, can her conservative politics and her inclination for spectacle be reconciled?

A fundamental influence on Cavendish's interpretation of womanhood – and, moreover, in her self-fashioning as an author – was one she would have discovered in exile: that of the femme forte, or heroic woman. This ancient paradigm found new life throughout the early modern period and advanced in reaction to the moralistic writing of seventeenth-century France which emphasised a woman's domestic role: 'her need to be chaste, obedient, and faithful, her unsuitability for any public office, and her tendency to succumb to temptation are frequently encountered'.[41] In contrast, the femme forte 'is not indolent, but energetic; not "mole", but "forte" […] she acts with heroic openness, and does not stoop to deceit as her sex in general is said to do'.[42] It is less an abandoning of womanhood, than a celebration and reappropriation of its unsullied virtues, centred on the 'paradox of strength in weakness, of virtue in female sex'. The femme forte may display her body in the public arena, but remains chaste – the heroic/modest binary

[41] Ian Maclean, *Woman Triumphant: Feminism in French Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 64.
[42] Maclean, *Woman Triumphant,* p. 86.

maintained.[43] The Fronde Uprisings of 1648–53 provided the ideal arena for the cultivation of the femme forte paradigm; the series of revolts were led by the Parisian nobility against the growing authority of the young king, Louis XIV (and his chief minister, Cardinal Mazarin) and the threat of heavy taxation.[44] Amongst the rebels, many noble women styled themselves as she-warriors. As Carol Barash has demonstrated, the idea of the femme forte encapsulated the contradiction at the heart of Cavendish's supposed proto-feminism. While extolling her own worthiness, Cavendish insists that 'generally all Women are weaker than Men, both in Body and Understanding' (*TWO,* sig. A5v). Her model of womanhood, like the femme forte paradigm, '[denies] women's rights as a group, while at the same time demanding political rights for some, shall we say, well-groomed women'.[45] In fact, Cavendish's rendering might be even more exclusive, reserved not just for the 'well-groomed' woman, but only for herself. The femme forte idea goes some way towards explaining Cavendish's approach to the egoist/proto-feminist dichotomy: she could be both powerful and assertive without straying from her defined place in the social hierarchy. She could present herself as both 'Margaret the First' and a 'loving and careful Wife'.

[43] Maclean, *Woman Triumphant,* p. 57.

[44] Katherine Goodman, *Amazons and Apprentices: Women and the German Parnassus in the Early Enlightenment* (Woodbridge: Camden House, 1999), p. 111.

[45] Carol Barash, *English Women's Poetry, 1649– 1714: Politics, Community, and Linguistic Authority* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 36.

Henrietta Maria was undoubtedly an early influence in Cavendish's experience of this heroic female spirit, adopting the title, 'Her She-Majesty, Generalissima'.[46] As Su Fang Ng suggests, a young Margaret might have witnessed court masques in which the Queen regularly assumed military roles and would have certainly known of her triumphant march on Oxford in 1643.[47] And by the time that Cavendish followed the Queen to Paris a year later, the city would have been bustling with similarly soldierly women; their leaders, the Duchesse de Longueville and Princesse de Condé, chose to dress in men's military regalia. Both Barash and Hero Chalmers maintain that Cavendish's authorial persona draws heavily on the approach of these noble wives who took arms in the city's uprisings – the Frondeuses.[48] Not only did she borrow from their hermaphroditic dress, the appellations that decorate the title pages of Cavendish's work (such as '*the thrice noble, illustrious and excellent princess* ' in her 1656 *Plays*) are also, Amy Scott Douglas notes, typical of those women who, in writings about their endeavours, were described in terms that emphasised their status and incumbent virtue – 'illustré', 'généreuse' and 'héroique'.[49]

[46] Quoted in Kate De Rycker, 'A World of One's Own: Margaret Cavendish and the Science of Self–Fashioning' in Jorge Bastos da Silva and Miguel Ramalhete Gomes, eds., *English Literature and Disciplines of Knowledge, Early Modern to Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 76– 93 (p. 81).
[47] Su Fang Ng, *Literature and the Politics of Family in Seventeenth– Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 45.
[48] Hero Chalmers, *Royalist Women Writers, 1650– 1689* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 40.
[49] Amy Scott Douglas, 'Enlarging Margaret: Cavendish, Shakespeare, and French Women Warriors and Writers' in Katherine Romack and James Fitzmaurice, eds., *Cavendish and Shakespeare: Interconnections* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 147– 178 (p. 168). Some examples are Madeleine de Scudéry's *Les Femmes Illustres* (1642); Anonymous, *La Femme Généreuse* (1643); du Bosc's *La Femme Héroique* (1645).

Cavendish also evidently shared in the Frondeuses' appreciation of writing as a 'politically-charged, heroic act'; in her first publication, *Poems and Fancies,* she mimics the role of 'Generalissima', addressing her female readers with a battle cry of solidarity:[50]

> [P]ray strengthen my Side in defending my Book […] And in this Battel may your Wit be quick, your Speech ready, and your Argument so strong, as to beat them out of the Feild of Dispute (*PF,* sig. A4r)

However, she is less concerned with the freedom of other women, than her own; this prefatory letter addresses only the noble, 'worthy' lady, women of influence who may sufficiently 'strengthen [her] side' as she broaches the male-dominated marketplace. Almost a decade later, in her 1662 play *Bell in Campo*, Cavendish would embody the same Frondeuses spirit in the character of Lady Victoria, who leads an army of female fighters to rescue their husbands from the enemy:

> Now or never is the time to prove the courage of our Sex, to get liberty and freedome from the Female Slavery, and to make our selves equal with men; for shall Men only sit in Honours chair, and Women stand as waiters by? (*P,* 609)

Here, Lady Victoria's words suggest that her gender's involvement in battle proves their worthiness to confront, but most importantly to support, men in daily life. Her calls for

[50] Ibid.

emancipation throughout the play are moderated by her determination to earn the respect of the opposite sex, 'tell them, that we are willing upon their submissions to be friends', she asserts (*P,* 617). Indeed, by the end of the play, Lady Victoria earns the reputation that, one might imagine, Cavendish would have enjoyed: 'for never man had so gallant and a noble a Lady, not more virtuous and Loving a wife' (*P,* 633). Cavendish's interpretation of womanhood, founded on the femme forte model, centres on singularity and moderation in equal measure.

Her reluctance to reveal her writing influences means that one can only speculate as to what texts she might have read on the subject of these 'heroic' women. The texts would most likely have been Madeleine de Scudéry's; the English translation of her novel sequence *Artamènes; or, The Grand Cyrus* (1649–53) was dedicated to Cavendish's sister-in-law, Lady Anne Lucas, by its publisher Humphrey Moseley on account of her perfect command of French.[51] It is possible, then, as Whitaker has contended, that Anne would have read these works, 'before they came out in translation' to the women of the Lucas family, including a young Margaret (whose ability to learn new languages was comparatively poor).[52] Once exiled in Paris, Cavendish may well have recognised Scudéry's name amongst those who entered into the *querelle des femmes* with her apologia of the heroic woman, *Les Femmes illustres* (1642). In this text, Scudéry includes a variety of orations or 'harangues' and a prefatory address 'Aux dames' ('To the Ladies')

[51] Madeleine de Scudéry, *Artamènes; or, The Grand Cyrus an Excellent New Romance in Ten Parts, written by that Excellent Wit of France, Monsieur de Scudery and now English by F.G., Gent.* (London, 1653), sig. A1r.
[52] Whitaker, *Mad Madge,* p. 22.

which may well have influenced Cavendish's own prefatory addresses to women throughout her oeuvre.[53]

However, it should be noted that Scudéry's role in Cavendish's writing might be complicated by her reception as a prominent member of the précieux movement, a significant, if short-lived, feature of French salon culture.[54] In pre-Revolutionary Paris, the salon referred to a coterie of typically aristocratic male and, most notably, female thinkers. For the woman writer, the salon provided an alternative to the print marketplace, allowing her to circulate manuscripts amongst peers (Scudéry held her meetings on Saturdays at her home in the Marais), the private nature of which, when compared to the conspicuous marketplace, no doubt fostered its subversive reputation.[55] Indeed, these women frequently challenged contemporary gender politics, particularly on marriage, tending 'to value their own sisterhood over motherhood and conjugal ties'.[56] The term 'précieuses' post-dated much of Scudéry's work; the derogatory title was popularised by Moliere's play *Les Précieuses ridicules* (1660) in which 'précieuse' ('precious') was meant to connote the pretention, arrogance and sexual repression of these women. Thus, while the femme forte or 'Frondeuses' image was readily embraced by male writers, presenting a woman empowered but not

53 Mihoko Suzuki, 'Political Writing Across Borders' in Patricia Phillippy, ed., *A History of Early Modern Women's Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 364– 381 (p. 371).
54 Marianne Legault, *Female Intimacies in Seventeenth– Century French Literature* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 129.
55 Jane Donawerth and Julie Strongson, eds., *Madeleine de Scudéry: Selected Letters, Orations, and Rhetorical Dialogues* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 6.
56 Stephanie Merrim, *Early Modern Women's Writing and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1999), p. 100.

empowered enough to challenge the gender hierarchy, the 'précieuses' movement was treated with derision as a paradigm of female thought that allowed for a woman's strength without subservience to men.[57] Cavendish provides no evidence that she attended any meetings of the 'précieuses' women (she instead records her husband's salon-style gatherings, variously dubbed the 'Cavendish circle', the 'Newcastle Circle' or 'Welbeck Academy'), but her awareness of the Frondeuses/Précieuses conflict might account for the vexed presentation of woman throughout her work; oscillating between motifs, she attempts to delineate her own position between singular 'creatoress' and dutiful wife.[58]

iii. Pens and Needles: Cavendish and Womanhood

Rather than concealing or denying her sex, Cavendish – in her pursuit for recognition – had perhaps little choice other than to make her womanhood a fundamental principle of her creative strategy. Indeed, what assured her artistic singularity was her gender: that she was a woman and consequently denied access to the learning of her male peers ensured a distinctive otherness. She may have desired the fame of her male peers, but she sought to achieve it through different, more 'authentic'

[57] Joan De Jean, *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origin of the Novel in France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 51.

[58] Some examples include Jacqueline Broad, who cites the 'the 'Cavendish' or 'Newcastle circle'', and Stephen Gaukroger, who refers to the same group as the 'Welbeck Academy' (Broad, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 37; Gaukroger, *The Emergence of a Scientific Culture: Science and the Shaping of Modernity, 1210– 1685* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 37).

or unaffected means. Fittingly, then, her text does not possess the lavish eloquence of her male contemporaries: rather than an ambrosial feast of learned richness, served from '*Golden Dishes* and *Chrystal Glasses*', her text is plain and simple fare, a 'Rye Loafe', offering substance for what it may lack in flair (*PF,* sig. A7r). Seasoned with a 'new *Butter*', Cavendish's writing aims to please a different palette that might favour her 'savoury' discourse – inoffensive if unornamented – to the 'sweet and delicious' (*PF,* sig. A7r).

This is just one of many instances in which Cavendish employs a culinary taxonomy in her writing allegory; the miscellaneity of her ruminations on poetry and natural philosophy is variously likened to stews or soups – a 'bisk', a 'hodge– podge' or 'olio' – as well as a 'posset', a curative drink of eggs, sugar, wine and spiced ale.[59] Cavendish seems profoundly aware of her work as the sum of many, often disparate, parts. Her blending of culinary and scholarly analogies is telling. In a similar way, Anne Bradstreet calls for a 'Thyme or Parsley Wreath, I ask no bayes'; in the place of the bay wreath, the mark of the honourable male poet, she desires a garland of comestible herbs.[60] The domestic and poetic are symbolically blended in the crowning of the female poet. In intermingling the two, both Bradstreet and Cavendish assimilate their expected roles and chosen vocations, the ostensible differences between them reconciled, even normalised.

[59] Anne Stobart, *Household Medicine in Seventeenth Century England* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 16.
[60] Bradstreet, *The Tenth Muse,* p. 4.

For Judith Elaine Walker, Cavendish is all too aware of her straying from the norm; her reference to 'rye' is intended with a homophonic ring, recalling in its place 'wry' with its contemporary connotations of deviance and perversity.[61] Her text is undeniably wry in this sense, Walker suggests, 'as it deviates from every accepted female norm of behaviour'.[62] Though her flouting of what was suitably 'feminine' has been the subject of much critical study, few have considered what paradigm of woman Cavendish favours in its place. This aspect of her engagement with womanhood thus warrants attention and, in particular, the role gender had to play in her creative enterprise. While, in the passage quoted above, the roles of both housewife and author are made compatible, the two were thought ill-assorted by wider seventeenth-century society. In not only writing, but also publishing her text, Cavendish stepped out from the encoded female virtue of modest silence, inviting 'a double fall', both sexual and social.[63] Given the phallocratic connection between virility and authorship evident in the works of male authors of her day, Cavendish sought to enter a highly sexualised environment where her breach of modesty was deemed highly provocative: 'to appear in print was to appear in public and hence speak to male attention'.[64]

Of course, Cavendish was not alone in her venture into print. Though female-authored texts remained a small percentage of the material produced by the printing

[61] Judith Elaine Walker, 'Longing for Ambrosia: Margaret Cavendish and the torment of the restless mind in *Poems and Fancies', Women's Writing*, 4.3 (1997), p. 343; 'wry', *adj*. and *adv*. (2.b.) 'Deflected from the straight course', in use since 1587, (e), *Oxford English Dictionary*, *OED* < http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/33862> [accessed January 2019].

[62] Walker, 'Longing for Ambrosia', p. 343– 4.

[63] Wall, *The Imprint of Gender*, p. 339.

[64] Krontiris, *Oppositional Voices,* p. 17.

presses, throughout the seventeenth century, the number of published women increased to the hundreds.[65] Regardless of their numbers, these women were met with antipathy: at the close of the century, in 1699, John Dryden still accused Aphra Behn of 'writing loosely' and thereby bringing 'some Scandal to the Modesty of her Sex'.[66] The challenges Cavendish faced, publishing several decades earlier, were even greater. To forestall such remarks, women writers often used self-effacing prefaces to apologise for their literary incompetency, aware of their violation of established gender codes. In the prefatory apparatus to her text, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611), Aemilia Lanyer excused her 'defective', 'rude unpollisht' work.[67] Katherine Philips, the 'Matchless Orinda', declared that writing was 'unfit for the sex to which I belong' and claimed that her work had been 'inadvertently' published in 1664.[68] As has already been shown in Cavendish's oeuvre, however, such contrite behaviour serves only as a thin veil to disguise her dogged ambition. What humility she does show is surely undermined by the ostentatious presentation of her texts themselves.

As Jane Stevenson notes, 'well over half of seventeenth-century women's ventures into print – approximately 60% – belong to the level of printing which was only

[65] Joad Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 298– 99.

[66] John Dryden, Charles E. Ward, ed., *The Letters of John Dryden* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1942), p. 127.

[67] Aemilia Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum containing 1. The passion of Christ, 2. Eves apologie in defence of women, 2. The tearses of the daughters of Jerusalem, 4. The salutation and sorrow of the Virgine Marie: with divers other things not unfit to be read, written by Mistres Aemilia Lanyer* (London, 1611), sig. A4r.

[68] Katherine Philips, *The Collected Works of Katherine Philips: The Letters,* ed. by Patrick Thomas (Stump Cross: Stump Cross Books, 1992), p. 145.

one step up from the broadsheet ballad: pamphlets which amounted to one or one-and-a-half sheets cut and folded'.[69] As a wealthy noblewoman, Cavendish could afford to go further, publishing selected texts in the highly respectable large folio format usually reserved for classical authors, Bibles or theological works despite her marginal voice. Not only that: she put both her face and her name to her text at a time when most publishing women chose to conceal their identities from the reading public. In doing so, Cavendish declares ownership of its contents in an ungainly, masculine display of proprietorship. Indeed, her claim to the text's intellectual property – or any property – was not legally valid in seventeenth-century England. To circumvent the rigid conventions of authorship, predicated on a virile territorial persona, many writing women published anonymously; more adopted pseudonyms. These aliases included abbreviated titles such as 'Mrs H.' or simply 'a Lady', which, registering the women's relation to their husband or patrilineal heritage, might have placated their male readers. Other women, Katherine Philips and Anne Finch amongst them, adopted pastoral names such as Orinda and Ardelia.[70] Though this did not conceal, but rather emphasise, their sex, such strategies helped create a persona at one remove from the author herself and so offered some protection from charges of indignity and dishonour.

In Cavendish's first publication, however, one finds a lavish frontispiece: an engraving taken from a painting by Dutch artist, Abraham van Diepenbeeck, showing the

[69] Jane Stevenson, 'Women and the Cultural Politics of Printing', *The Seventeenth Century,* 24 (2009), pp. 205– 37 (p. 207).

[70] Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 36.

author in the guise of a neoclassical sculpture flanked by Apollo, god of music and poetry, and Minerva, goddess of wisdom.[71] Not only does Cavendish commit her name and face to her text, but she does so with the divine authorisation of both male and female patrons. Her statue stands barefooted in a niche as though on a stage, surrounded with cornucopias, her hair and ermine-lined robe swathed loosely. The image is self-aggrandising, extravagant, almost regal: it conveys, at once, her nobility (a small crown is positioned at the back of her head), her generosity of wit and, most markedly, her ambition. And yet, despite this highly theatrical display of feminine beauty and power, Cavendish includes an inscription which warns its reader against, what Elizabeth Kubek calls 'the seduction of the visual image':[72]

> Here on this Figure cast a Glance,
> But so as if it were by Chance,
> Your eyes not fixt, they must not stay,
> Since this like Shadows to the Day
> It only represents; for Still
> Her Beauty's fond beyond the Skill
> Of the best Paynter to Imbrace,
> Those lovely Lines within her face;

[71] Sylvia Bowerbank, 'Margaret Cavendish, Marchioness of Newcastle' in Helen Ostovich and Elizabeth Sauer, eds. *Reading Early Modern Women: An Anthology of Texts, Manuscript and Print,* 1550– 1700 (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 81.

[72] Elizabeth Kubek, 'Speaking Pictures, Magic Mirrors: Illustration and the Limits of Signification' in Christiania Ionescu, ed., *Book Illustration in the Long Eighteenth Century: Reconfiguring the Visual Periphery of the Text* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), pp. 399–430 (p. 406).

View her Soul's Picture, Judgment, wit,
Then read those Lines which Shee hath writt,
By Phancy's Pencill drawne alone,
Which Piece but Shee Can justly owne. (*PF,* title page)

Cavendish does not specify the author of the inscription, though one might attribute agency to her as she takes full and obvious responsibility for the volume as a whole. In what would seem a deliberate provocation, she presents her image while denying its mimetic power to convey the worthiness of her text, 'like Shadows to the Day/ It only represents'. The poem anticipates Cavendish's dissatisfaction with the empirical eye that would manifest itself in her later philosophical prose. By displacing the speaker of these lines, Cavendish creates the illusion of an anterior authority that imbues the words with an objective gravity: the value of her work should not be judged by the standards of her feminine beauty, which, according to convention, is to be looked upon, but not heard from. Only through the 'Lines which Shee hath writt' can the reader determine the merit of the author's 'Soul's Picture, Judgment, wit'. Drawn in by her 'lovely' face, then, Cavendish's reader is moved to acknowledge that the woman pictured is more than a muse, but a literary authority in her own right.

What is most intriguing about the frontispiece is its likeness to the images that filled Pierre Le Moyne's *La Galerie des Femmes Fortes* (1647, translated as *The Gallery of Heroick Women*, 1652). The text was a keystone of the French movement and presented a selection of significant women throughout history, their story, the 'moral question' that determined their mythic status and a contemporary example of a woman who

demonstrated the same virtue. Again, as with Scudéry's work, there is no evidence to suggest that Cavendish read Le Moyne's text, but one can evidence her awareness of it; in a 1667 letter from her close friend, Walter Charleton, her inhabiting of the femme forte image is verified,

> your Grace's Statue ought to be placed alone, and at the upper end, in *The Gallery of Heroic Women,* and upon a Pedestal more advanced than the rest… for ought we know, you are the *First* great Lady, that ever Wrote so much and so much of your own: and, for ought we can divine, you will also be the Last.[73]

In particular, there are marked similarities between Cavendish's frontispiece and Le Moyne's illustration of 'Porcia': the women share a similar stance and both have swathing robes and flowing curls about their shoulders.[74] Moreover, if the Duchess had read the text, Cato's daughter would have proved a fitting model: a keen she-philosopher who, Le Moyne writes, became 'wise and learned' under tutorship of her husband, Brutus, and credited with assisting him 'in contriving the Destiny of the Empire'.[75] Porcia is not only a worthy companion, but an intellectual in her own right. In 1653, when she returned to London without Newcastle, Cavendish may have recognised the same melancholic distress in Le Moyne's depiction of Porcia, similarly forced to separate from Brutus. Indeed, *The Gallery of Heroic Woman* presents Porcia's tale as a

[73] *Letters and Poems,* p. 117– 8.

[74] Pierre Le Moyne, *The Gallery of Heroic Women written in French by Peter Le Moyne of the Society of Jesus; translated into English by the Marquesse of Winchester* (London, 1652), p. 33.

[75] Le Moyne, *The Gallery of Heroic Women,* p. 38.

lesson to husbands, 'that Wives are given them for Assistants and Co-adjustresses'.[76] In the femme forte tradition, then, Cavendish found an archetype of womanhood that could be both learned and compliant. Portia's legend, in particular, proved that such a woman could achieve the 'eternall lustre' of fame which paralleled that of '*Cato* and *Brutus*'.[77]

The paradigm of womanhood presented here is one that antagonises accepted gender codes without subverting them altogether. Just as she suggests that a woman can be both domestic and inventive, commanding both culinary and poetic or philosophical vernaculars, so too can she be beautiful and authoritative. Her venture into authorship does not, and should not, come at the cost of her femininity; rather than subverting gender boundaries, then, Cavendish posits some degree of fluidity within them. For example, in her autobiography, 'A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding and Life' (1655), she records how, from childhood,

> I was addicted […] to contemplation rather than conversation, to solitariness rather than society, to melancholy rather than mirth, to write with the pen than to work with the needle, passing my time with harmless fancies, their company being pleasing, their conversation innocent. (*NP,* 385)

The parallelism of the passage brings the dichotomy of private and public spheres into sharp focus as Cavendish contrasts what are, arguably, the obligations of the female with those of the male. Yet, the pattern is deliberately skewed with her assertion that she

[76] Ibid.

[77] Le Moyne, *The Gallery of Heroic Women,* p. 36.

would rather 'write with the pen than to work with the needle'. In this clause, the previous arrangement of female/male is inverted as writing with the pen joins contemplation and solitariness in her revision of the female archetype.

The phrase anticipates Anne Finch's words, written later in the seventeenth century, that 'a woman that attempts the pen' was 'an intruder on the rights of men'.[78] Evidently, by the time that Finch's poem was written, in the 1680s or 90s, the vexed position of the woman writer had changed little. Indeed, Cavendish's career is bookended by women who shirked needlework in favour of the pen; shortly before the then-marchioness' own debut publication, Anne Bradstreet had written,

> I am obnoxious to each carping tongue,
> Who sayes, my hand a needle better fits,
> A Poets Pen, all scorn, I should thus wrong;
> For such despight they cast on female wits:
> If what I doe prove well, it wo'nt advance,
> They'l say it's stolne, or else, it was by chance.[79]

Bradstreet's words similarly contrast the pen and the needle as the tools of men and women, respectively. Her preference for the pen leaves her vulnerable, or 'obnoxious', to the vitriol of male critics. With Cavendish reluctant to reveal her influences, one cannot

[78] Anne Finch, 'The Introduction' in Myra Reynolds, ed., *The Poems of Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1903), p. 4–5.
[79] Bradstreet, *The Tenth Muse,* p. 4.

be sure if she read Bradstreet's text, though it is certainly possible that she encountered it on her visit to London in the 1650s.

Though vastly different in character and reputation, there are notable similarities between the two women's ideas and gender politics; both ably discuss science and philosophy, including the elements and four humours, with Bradstreet's work modelled on the poems of Du Bartas no less.[80] Her knowledge of Du Bartas might also account for her own depiction of chaos as 'new birth', a notion not dissimilar to Cavendish's own view that opportunity and variety may spring from disorder.[81] Like Cavendish, too, Bradstreet petitioned for leeway within, rather than an overturning of, cramped gender conventions:

> Men have precedency, and still excel,
> It is but vaine, unjustly to wage war,
> Men can doe best, and Women know it well;
> Preheminence in each, and all is yours,
> Yet grant some small acknowledgement of ours.[82]

The closing half rhyme reinforces her call for a mutual respect between the sexes; 'yours/ours' serve as a rhyming couplet despite being visually similar and aurally

[80] Sarah C. E. Ross, *Women, Poetry and Politics in Seventeenth– Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 14.
[81] Bradstreet, *The Tenth Muse,* p. 5.
[82] Bradstreet, *The Tenth Muse*, p. 4.

different. Morphologically, too, the female 'ours' is a fraction of the masculine 'yours'. However, while they share the same bold, if conservative, outlook, Bradstreet was wary of presenting herself as eccentric and apart from the norm. One may suggest that this is partly why she was comparatively well received amongst contemporary literary circles, with two editions of her work appearing in the seventeenth century, both prefaced with encomia from puritan clergymen. The most telling of these prefatory tributes is offered by Bradstreet's brother-in-law, John Woodbridge, who suggests that he published her volume without her authority, 'If you shall think, it will be to your shame/ To be in print, then I must beare the blame:/ I't be a fault, 'tis mine'.[83] As Gillian Wright discusses in *Producing Women's Poetry*, Woodbridge's preface to *The Tenth Muse* is as celebratory as it is misogynistic, reiterating the belief that women are the 'inferiour Sex' while presenting Bradstreet as an exception: her readers might 'question whether it be a womans Work, and aske, Is it possible?'[84] Thus, though Bradstreet shares in Cavendish's venture into the male arenas of knowledge, she apparently does so against her will. The preservation of her modesty is assured.

In her study on the history of embroidery, *The Subversive Stitch,* Rozsika Parker identifies in early modern narratives the 'almost axiomatic' nature by which 'a woman wanting to enter a supposedly 'masculine' sphere of activity repudiated femininity in the form of embroidery', or the needle.[85] While this notion is fulfilled by both Cavendish and

[83] Bradstreet, *The Tenth Muse*, sig. A6r.

[84] Gillian Wright, *Producing Women's Poetry, 1600– 1730: Text and Paratext, Manuscript and Print* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 66– 8; Bradstreet, *The Tenth Muse*, sig. A3r.

[85] Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2010), p. 103.

Bradstreet, Cavendish goes further, heralding instead the pen as the more fitting apparatus of femininity. This idea pervades even the private correspondence between the Duchess and her husband (which she, interestingly, chooses to publish as part of her biography, *The life of the thrice noble, high, and puissant prince William Cavendish* (1667)):

> [Your actions] have been of war and fighting, mine of contemplating and writing: yours were performed publicly in the field, mine privately in my closet: yours had many thousand eye-witnesses, mine none but my waiting-maids. (*LWC*, sig. B1r)

Cavendish reinforces the differences between their respective 'duties': along with the expectations of the male, particularly his engagement with public life, she replaces 'writing' with 'fighting' as the appropriate occupation of men. She then able to appropriate the pen as a more fitting representation of contemplative womanhood. Rather than repudiating her femininity, then, she displaces it, offering writing as a suitable appendage to the reserve and modesty expected of her fellow woman in the private sphere of her 'closet'. Of course, in continuing to print and disseminate her writing publicly, Cavendish breached her own boundaries of public and private. And she did so with awareness of the criticism to come, as she suggests in words foreshadowing Finch: 'I imagine […] *Men* will cast a *smile* of *scorne* upon my *Book* because they think thereby, *Women* incroach too much upon their *Prerogatives*' (*PF,* sig. A3r–A3v). She was undoubtedly aware of the opposition she faced in a cultural milieu wherein men held 'Books as their Crowne, and the Sword as their Scepter, by which they rule and governe' (*PF,* sig. A3v). Given her attempts elsewhere to colonise the pen for women writers,

Cavendish's decision to cite the patriarchal control of *books* here seems a loaded one. Indeed, if one were to rewrite the passage, it would perhaps make more sense to suggest that men lauded the pen and the sword ('the Pen as their Crowne, and the Sword as their Scepter'), given their ability to harm figuratively and literally, and their relation to the phallus. In this subtle nuance, choosing 'book' rather than 'pen', Cavendish confounds her displacement of conventional femininity: she implies that men rule by their *learning* of texts, not by their *writing* of them. Their power comes from their knowledge of texts, not necessarily their ability to create them. Instead, the creation and authorship of texts by the pen is the province of the creative woman. While men have the power of knowledge, women have the power of imagination.

Nowhere is this idea more evident than in the frontispiece to *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655), taken from an engraving by Flemish painter, Pieter van Schuppen.[86] Compared to the theatre and pretension of her first text's engraving, this conveys an entirely different aspect of Cavendish's authorial persona – the solitary thinker. The engraving shows Cavendish sitting at her desk with pen and paper poised for use, while putti carry a crown of laurels, the mark of the honourable poet. For all this ostentation, however, the rest of the scene is empty; though she sits in her 'library', as Sylvia Bowerbank notes, she is 'not oppressed by old books or musty philosophical legacies'; the room is bare.[87] The inscription reads:

[86] This frontispiece is not available on *Early English Books Online,* but is reproduced in Ostovich, *Reading Early Modern Women,* p. 80. Cavendish appears to have moved between three different frontispieces throughout her career, the two aforementioned and a third depicting a family gathering with the lines: 'Thus in this Semi– Circle, wher they Sitt/ Telling of Tales of Pleasure & of witt'.

[87] Bowerbank, 'Margaret Cavendish, Marchioness of Newcastle' in *Reading Early Modern Women,* p. 81.

Studious She is and all Alone
Most visitants, when She has none,
Her Library on which She look's
It is her Head, her Thoughts her Books.
Scorninge dead Ashes without fire
For her owne Flames doe her Inspire. (*PPO*, title page)[88]

Cavendish's library is 'her head', her own thoughts, the source and stimulus of her creations. Again, rather than serving as the muse of the male poet, she asserts herself as her own muse: 'For her owne Flames doe her Inspire'.

One might suggest that this frontispiece is the truest representation of Cavendish's female archetype: it is a defiant statement of the self-sufficiency of her womanhood, as her contemporary Richard Flecknoe registered:

What place is this! Looks like some sacred cell
Where ancient hermits formerly did dwell…
Is this a lady's closet? 't cannot be;
For nothing here of vanity we see,
Nothing of curiosity or pride,
As most ladies' closets have beside…

[88] Bowerbank, *Reading Early Modern Women,* p. 80.

Nor is't a library, but only as she

Makes each place where she comes a library.[89]

If the preserve of male knowledge is the book, then in this frontispiece, she dismisses this knowledge *in toto* by erasing it from her authorial portrait. The would-be library is instead doubly reimagined: its narrowness acknowledges the cramped domestic realm in which she was expected to operate and, simultaneously, transforms it into a tardis-like space primed for creative enterprise. Flecknoe's tribute was likely to have been coloured by his being another client of Newcastle, though his words are telling for their repeated registering of the central tenet of Cavendish's authorship: her singularity. Though she was not the only female proponent of her atomic philosophy nor the only woman to share her gender politics, she maintains a semblance of intellectual segregation. While it may never be proven that she read, or was even aware of, the likes of Bradstreet, it is significant that her authorial persona relies on, what Paul Salzman has called, her 'dis-identification with other women writers', or indeed with other writers altogether.[90]

iv. Bees and Spiders: The 'Happy Creatoress'

[89] Richard Flecknoe, *A Farrago of Several Pieces* (London, 1666), p. 13.

[90] Paul Salzman, 'Identifying As (Women) Writers' in Mihoko Suzuki, ed., *The History of British Women's Writing, 1610– 1690: Volume Three* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 33–47 (p. 33).

Cavendish would find another fitting emblem for her role as a creatoress in the spider; the creature – spinning not from yarn, but from within itself – encapsulated the factors at the heart of her self-fashioning, her singularity, which was in turn assured by her womanhood. The spider motif is most explicitly used in her first text, *Poems and Fancies,* where she goes to great lengths to both define and distinguish her own idiosyncratic method of invention:

> True it is, Spinning with the Fingers is more proper to our Sexe, then Studying or writing Poetry, which is the Spinning with the braine: but I having no skill in the Art of the first […] made me delight in the latter. (*PF,* sig. A2r)

As Constance Classen suggests, the image itself weaves together preoccupations of both men and women: her work involves a coalescence of 'spinning as a female tactile practice and writing as a male visual practice'.[91] Again, Cavendish's modesty is somewhat suspicious. She goes some way towards legitimising her debut publication by depreciating her ability to conform to typical standards of womanhood. And yet, she also engages with a long tradition that associated texts and textiles; she suggests that, if it is deemed 'more proper' for women to weave fabric, it is surely 'more proper' for them to 'weave […] those words of Sense' that produce poetry (*PF,* 136). While appearing to distinguish spinning from writing as an appropriate pursuit of the female sex, she actually equates the two, the former, 'Spinning with the Fingers', the latter, 'Spinning with the braine'. This section will continue to consider the relevance of Cavendish's use

[91] Constance Classen, *The Colour of Angels: Cosmology, Gender and the Aesthetic Imagination* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 99.

of the spinning image – first discussed in Sylvia Bowerbank's study 'The Spider's Delight: Margaret Cavendish and the Female Imagination' – and pursue the idea of spinning with the brain, amongst other motifs, to determine how Cavendish sought to describe the creative process.

Cavendish insists that 'a true poet is like a Spider that spins all out of *her* own bowels' (emphasis mine): the poet is thus both an original spinner and a woman. Cavendish's presentation of the ideal, or 'true', creator might call to mind the myth of Arachne, the woman who, after challenging the male-identified Athena to a weaving contest, was transformed into a spider. Indeed, Arachne's hubris is checked by male power to such an extent that she must create instead from what remains, in this case, her own bodily secretions.[92] However, Cavendish does not make her affiliation to Arachne explicit (which may be unsurprising, given her reluctance to give up her influences), so one might look to an altogether different tradition. Originally one of Aesop's fables, the wrangle between the Bee and the Spider was revived throughout the early modern period to denote two polarised forms of creativity. In 'The New Organon' (1620), Sir Francis Bacon compares spiders 'who make cobwebs of their own substance', to bees that gather their material 'from the flowers of the garden and of the field, but transform[…] and digest […] it by a power of [their] own'.[93]

[92] Patricia B. Salzman– Mitchell, *A Web of Fantasies: Gaze, Image and Gender in Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2005), p. 125.

[93] Francis Bacon, *Francis Bacon: The New Organon,* eds. by Lisa Jardine and Michael Silverthorne, eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 79.

Bacon's contemporaries lauded the bee as the emblem of a neoclassical aesthetic, a self-conscious imitation of classical texts. The spider, on the other hand, was criticised for its egoism, 'feeding and engendering on it self' until it produced only 'Excrement and Venom' in a web of filth.[94] This tradition sullied the representation of the spider throughout the period; Beaumont and Fletcher referred to the 'venom-drawing' creature, who makes 'poison of that which was a saving antidote'.[95] Jonson's *Volpone* (1606), too, alludes to the folklore:

> SIR POLITIC
> Yes, sir: the bee and the spider, ofttimes,
> Suck from one flower.[96]

While the first draws sweetness, the other, poison. The most developed explication of the bee– spider contest in the period was in Jonathan Swift's *Battle of the Books* (1704). The text allegorised a brewing dispute between the Ancients and the Moderns on the worthiness of classical learning, which is interrupted by a retelling of the fable. Here, the spider embodies ultimate subjectivity: 'I am a domestic animal, furnished with a native stock within myself'. The creature's 'large Castle' is built 'with my own Hands, and the Materials extracted altogether out of my own Person'.[97] For the bee, the spider's yield is

[94] Jonathan Swift, *Battle of the Books* (London, 1704), p. 234.
[95] Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, ed. by Fredson Bowers, Volume 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 268.
[96] Ben Jonson, *Ben Jonson: Four Comedies,* ed. by Helen Ostovich (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 106 (2.1.30– 31).
[97] Swift, *Battle of the Books,* p. 159.

little but 'dirt, spun out of your own entrails […] the duration of which, like that of other spiders' webs, may be imputed to their being forgotten, or neglected, or hid in a corner'. As Bowerbank writes, Cavendish's 'mentality […] is the target of Swift's *Battle of the Books*' in which the bee represents the only form of productive creativity.[98]

It is likely that Cavendish was aware of the popular allegory (Newcastle's library contained much of Bacon's work) and despite the spider's poor reputation she more than likely favoured its original creativity, *ex nihilo*, over the bee's seemingly predictable regurgitation.[99] It is significant, then, that Cavendish should end her first publication with the following verse,

> A *Poet* I am neither *borne,* nor bred,
> But to a *witty Poet* married:
> *Whose Braine* is *Fresh,* and *Pleasant,* as the Spring,
> Where *Fancies* grow, and where the *Muses* sing.
> […] And from that *Garden Flowers* of *Fancies* take,
> Whereof a *Posie* up in *Verse* I make.
> Thus I, that have no *Garden* of mine owne,
> There gather *Flowers* that are *newly blowne.* (*PF,* 214)

[98] Bowerbank, 'The Spider's Delight', p. 7.

[99] Nathaniel Noel, *Bibliotheca nobilissimi principis Johannis Ducis de Novo– Castro, & Large Collection of Books Contain'd in the Libraries of the most Noble William and Henry Cavendish, and John Hollis, Late Dukes of Newcastle* (London, 1719).

Again, the fierce ambition she conveys throughout the text is tempered with a gesture to conventional modesty and deference to her status as a wife first, and a poet second. It is interesting that, in light of the contemporary bee– spider contest, Cavendish should characterise her husband in the guise of the bee with a Baconian image: though a '*witty Poet',* he selects his '*Flowers of Fancies'* from the '*Garden*'.

Of course, Cavendish has her reader believe that, like most women, she had no choice but to be the spider. She lacked the education, language and learning to pick from the 'Garden' of literary greats as the bee could.[100] Cavendish appears to be one of few who saw the value of the spider's method, anticipating an appreciation of arachnid artistry that was to flourish in the centuries to follow. Over a century later, Keats endorsed the motif: 'the points of leaves and twigs on which the Spider begins *her* work are few, and *she* fills the air with a beautiful circuiting' (emphasis mine).[101] Keats evidently recognised the benefits of the spider's method just as Cavendish did before him and attributes it with a decidedly feminine persona. The bee's emulative method is thus contrasted with the Romantic celebration of the absolute ingenuity of the author. With 'few' sources, an empty room, the spider is able to spin a complex web, a whole library of thoughts and ideas. Re-appropriating 'spinning' for her own, then, Cavendish intends her reader to register its connotations with both the domestic woman and the solipsistic creative. She resolves to 'spin a Garment of Memory', rather than those made

[100] Cavendish's education should be understood in relation to the norms for women in her period. See discussion below, pp. 277-92.

[101] John Keats, *Selected Letters of John Keats,* ed. by Grant F. Scott (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 92.

by other spinsters (*PF,* sig. A2r). In the spinning image the two halves of her self-fashioning, woman and creative, become one – she will spin with her brain, a 'happy creatoress'. Her gender does not impede but informs her capacity to create. Though 'all braines work naturally and incessantly', she writes, the female brain was particular for its working in 'a Fantasticall motion'; poetry, in particular, 'which is built upon *Fancy, Women* may claime, as a worke belonging most properly to themselves' (*PF,* sig. A3r).

v. Strings and Keys: Cavendish's Materialist Mind

Having identified the brain as the hub of creativity, separate from the spider's bowels, Cavendish then turned to exactly *how* it sought to create. A discussion of this will determine Cavendish's epistemological and ontological approaches to her role as creatoress, in particular, her view of the interaction between mind and body. What exactly was the mind and how did it express itself? What contemporary philosophies does Cavendish engage with, if any? Indeed, Cavendish's method – so dependent on the 'Fantasticall motion' of the brain and its imaginative capabilities – at first borrowed from and later stood in opposition to the leading thinkers of her day, most notably that of Thomas Hobbes (1588 – 1679). Though her first text oscillates between mechanist and vitalist modes, her entire natural philosophy is undoubtedly materialist at its core. Hobbes, one of the century's most prominent materialists, propounded a system in which all things, including the imagination, are made of tangible matter forming a part of a material universe. As Battigelli asserts, Hobbes was an 'intimate and valued friend' of Newcastle and, though Cavendish insists in 1655 that 'I never spake to Master Hobbes

twenty words in my life', she does appear to have met him (*PPO,* sig. B3v).[102] In her biography of Newcastle, she records how 'when my Lord was at *Paris,* in his Exile', she overhears him 'discoursing with some of his Friends, amongst whom was also that Learned Philosopher *Hobbes*' (*LWC,* 143).

Before 1650, Hobbes' work was published in Latin and so Cavendish, not proficient in languages, is most likely to have received the knowledge of atomism that pervades *Poems and Fancies* from conversations with her husband, and her brother-in-law, Charles, who had both conversed with the man in person and had likely read his Latin texts. Indeed, though her library at Welbeck Abbey has not been preserved, a 1719 catalogue for the auction of the Newcastles' Library includes, amongst some 457 English titles, the work of Hobbes: *Of Human Nature* (1650), *Leviathan* (1670) and *Dialogues of Natural Philosophy* (1678).[103] Thus, while it cannot be guaranteed that Margaret herself read these texts, they were very probably in circulation in the household, influencing the thoughts and conversations of those she lived with. As modern readers are unable to reproduce an adequate account of what and how she read, it is therefore necessary to reconstruct the intellectual milieu that surrounded her including the theories and philosophies that would have been in circulation at that time.

[102] Battigelli, *Exiles of the Mind*, p. 65.

[103] Nathaniel Noel, *Bibliotheca nobilissimi principis Johannis Ducis de Novo– Castro.* Citations of the texts listed can be found on the following pages: p. 15, p. 42, p. 55. Lara Dodds writes on the auction's reliability in *The Literary Invention of Margaret Cavendish,* p. 239.

Recent initiatives like *The Six Degrees of Francis Bacon* project have attempted to throw light on this issue.[104] Developed at Carnegie Mellon and Georgetown University, this web resource attempts to reproduce early modern social networks. Tracing possible connections via the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, the website presents the user with a digitalised 'map' of social connections. The site can also rank relationships by their reliability (out of a possible 1.0); the likelihood of Cavendish having known her husband, for example, is rated 0.9, while her connection to Thomas Hobbes is 0.35. It should be noted that there are limitations to the site: not all relationships can be accounted for, no evidence is given for the results provided and the lack of women recorded in the *ODNB* affects the bias of its results, which might not accurately reflect the social connections of women at the time. Despite this, the project is an illuminating resource for evidencing the interconnectedness of people and ideas during the early modern era. Many of the Cavendish's connections are at the lower end of the scale. Given her own account of meeting Hobbes, it is likely – as Shawn Moore, curator of The Digital Cavendish Project, explains – that many of her social connections were similarly 'extra-personal' and involved rarely, if ever meeting in person, but communicating instead through her work or correspondence. Thus, a crucial line of transmission would have been the connections afforded by her husband, figurehead of the 'Cavendish Circle', an elite group of playwrights, philosophers, poets and musicians, as she suggests in *Philosophical Fancies* (1653):

> For seven yeares 'tis, since I have married bin;

[104] Christopher Warren, *Six Degree of Francis Bacon* <www.sixdegreesoffrancisbacon.com> [accessed January 2019].

Which time, my *Braine* might be a *Magazine,*

To store up wise discourse, naturally sent,

In fluent words, which free, and easie went. (*PhF,* sig. A4v)

Though the *Six Degrees of Francis Bacon* archive is not finished and cannot be definitive, it offers a starting point from which one can consider, approximately if not conclusively, the sorts and speakers of 'wise discourse' that Cavendish may have overheard.

One notable link that the site does not account for is Cavendish's connection to René Descartes (1596– 1650). In tune with Hobbes, Cavendish's philosophy challenged Cartesian thinking, which insisted that the imagination and sense perceptions were unreliable and deceptive. For Descartes, the mind's interpretation of the physical world is uncertain; the only thing that *is* certain is one's self-consciousness – 'I think, therefore I am'.[105] Accordingly, thoughts need not find an epistemological root in the physical world. However, for Cavendish, 'all thoughts have not onely a being, but a material being in Nature; nay, even the Thought of the existence of the Deity' (*OUEP,* 8). To illustrate her belief in an embodied universe, Cavendish's *Poems and Fancies* details a philosophy of atoms – round, flat, long and sharp – in perpetual motion: 'four Atomes the Substance is of all;/ With their foure Figures make a worldly Ball' (*PF,* 31). She traces the atomic composition of various things, from fruit and vegetables to colic and apoplexy, as well as the mechanics of fire, ice and evaporated air, each involving the violent collision of

[105] For more, Stephen Voss, 'Descartes: Heart and Soul', in John P. Wright, ed., *Psyche and Soma: Physicians and Metaphysicians on the Mind– Body Problem from Antiquity to Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 173– 196.

different shaped atoms (*PF,* 6, 12, 15). These infinitesimal components of the cosmos and the mechanics of their working are, at once, knowable and concrete.

The striking absence in her discussion is that on the atomic composition of the mind. Though the process of thinking was a fundamental part of Cavendish's materialist outlook, her otherwise exhaustive work is suddenly decidedly vague; '*Wit*, and *Understanding* in the *Braine*,/ Are as the severall *Atomes* reigne', but what atoms, in what motion, she cares not to say (*PF,* 16). Over the course of the text, Cavendish seeks to counter the ideas that typified Cartesian dualism with a mechanic-materialist logic, repeatedly 'similizing' the brain to physical entities in an attempt to make its workings visible and cognisable:

> The *Heart* like to a *Harp* compare I may,
> The *Passions, strings* on which the *Mind* doth play;
> A *Harmony,* when they just time do keep,
> With *Notes* of *Peace* they bring the *Soule* to sleep.
>
> The *Head,* unto an *Organ* I compare,
> The *Thoughts*, as several *Pipes* make *Musick there.*
> *Imagination's Bag* doth draw, then blow
> Windy *Opinions,* by which the *Thoughts* go. (*PF,* 137)

Extrapolating the theories of contemporary philosophers like Hobbes and French philosopher, Pierre Gassendi (1592 – 1655) – another prominent materialist, who

postulated a system of atoms relating to the senses, i.e., those responsible for light, sound, warmth and cold – Cavendish suggests that mental processes are brought about by physical and mechanical interactions. Just as music is produced through the physical interactions of fingers on strings or keys, so too is thought, which is similarly non-physical, produced by the interaction of atoms in the brain.

Indeed, Cavendish was not the first to find musical instruments a fitting analogy for the interactions between mind and body. A similar image appears in Descartes' *De Homine Figuris* (published in 1662, but drafted as early as 1632), where the pneumatic organ serves to represent what he believed to be the automaton body, or 'animal machine', in which the bellows, wind trunks, pipes and air stood for the heart, brain, nerves and animal spirits, respectively.[106] The sensations experienced by such a machine are, Descartes suggests, little to do with consciousness, but rather the result of what he referred to as 'animal spirits' working on the nerves (or air being sent through the organ's pipes, to continue the analogy).[107] By comparison, he does not offer an explanation of the mind; given its immaterial nature, he suggests, it cannot be explained through material means.[108] Though they both employ mechanist analogies to describe the workings of the body, it is at this point that similarities between the philosophies of Cavendish and Descartes end. Indeed, Cavendish was no dualist and could not accurately be dubbed a mechanist either.

[106] Jamie Croy Kassler, *Inner Music: Hobbes, Hooke and North on Inner Character* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1995), p. 43– 4.

[107] Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish,* p. 133.

[108] Ross W. Buck, 'The Epistemology of Reason and Affect' in Joan C. Borod, ed., *The Neuropsychology of Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 31– 55 (pp. 33).

It is likely that Cavendish was aware of Descartes' belief in the animal machine, if not the very analogy of the organ, as the philosopher defended his idea throughout correspondence with her husband. Descartes was another visitor to the Cavendishes' home in Paris as Cavendish writes, 'I never spake to monsieur De Cartes in my life, nor ever understood what he said, for he spake no English […] and those times I saw him, which was twice at dinner with my Lord at Paris, he did appear to me a man of the fewest words I ever heard' (*PPO,* sig. B3v). It would appear that the majority of Descartes' connection to Newcastle was epistolary. In one particular letter, he maintains his belief that animals act 'without any thought'. He writes, presumably against Newcastle's rebuttals as an avid horseman, that while 'animals do many things better than we do, but this does not surprise me […] it can even be used to prove they act naturally and mechanically, like a clock, which tells the time better than our judgement does'.[109] This reasoning was deemed to differentiate the essentially fallible human being from the inanimate (and, indeed, animals). What differentiated humans was, of course, the 'ghost' in the machine; the mind therefore *could* affect the body through the pineal gland, the principal seat of the soul.[110] This gland was able to indirectly excite the 'animal spirits', the body's immaterial communicators (described as 'a very fine wind, or rather a very lively and pure flame'), which would then travel along the nerves to the

[109] Rene Descartes, *Descartes: Philosophical Letters,* trans. and ed. Anthony Kenny (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1970), p. 207.

[110] Rene Descartes, *Descartes: Selected Philosophical Writings,* trans. and ed. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 231.

body's motor receptors.[111] As Lisa Sarasohn explains in her elucidation of Cavendish's natural philosophy, for the Duchess, clocks, animals and humans each have their own level of knowledge and self-awareness according to their function and purpose.[112] Indeed, in her *Philosophical Letters*, Cavendish wrote that,

> [A] watchmaker doth not give the watch its motion, but he is only the occasion, that the watch moves after that manner, for the motion of the watch is the watch's own motion, inherent in those parts ever since that matter was. (*PL*, 1664, 100)

Moreover, Cavendish disagreed with the notion that an immaterial thing (the 'ghost') could interact or even influence a material thing (the 'machine'). As she notes in her *Orations Upon Experimental Philosophy,* the notion that 'all knowledge is in the mind' and none in the body 'is a very odd opinion'. That the 'sensitive spirits […] like faithful servants, run to and fro […] to the brain and back, to carry news to the mind' without any form of cognition did not conform to her own reasoning – 'I wonder how they can inform the mind of what they do not know themselves' (*OUEP,* 183).[113] She thus overcomes the mind-body dilemma by determining that mind and body must be made of the same stuff – both are material. In this way, they may interrelate; 'the minde feeds as

[111] C. F. Fowler, *Descartes on the Human Soul: Philosophy and the Demands of Christian Doctrine* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1999), p. 167.

[112] Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish,* p. 134.

[113] Cavendish directly confronts Descartes work in her *Philosophical Letters* (1664), in which she disputes, 'his *discourse of method,* [….] says he, *it is not for wants of the organs belonging to the framing of words, as we may observe in Parrats and Pies, which are apt enough to express words they are taught, but understand nothing of them'* (*PL,* 113).

greatly on thoughts, as a hungry stomacke doth upon meat' (*PPO,* 110). One might therefore suggest that Cavendish's own reference to the head as 'an *Organ'* is, in fact, an early reworking of the Cartesian model, in which she exchanges the materialism, if not the mechanism, of the animal body for that of the mind, as per her own peculiar epistemology.

As her career progressed, Cavendish's stance on atomic materialism altered to incorporate a vitalistic energy, though scholars disagree on when this change took place. Indeed, that she almost certainly received her knowledge of atomism second-hand may account for the nuances that distinguished Cavendish's work from a definitive Hobbesian discourse at the beginning of her career; this knowledge, together with her own musings, produce a peculiar amalgam of materialist theories. In *Poems and Fancies,* the mechanistic atomism that filled the first chapters of Hobbes' *Leviathan* runs parallel to vitalist analogies. In the extract below, Cavendish anticipates her transition, suggesting that each body of matter, or atom, moved according to its own distinctive internal, vital, principle:

> Small Atomes of themselves a World may make,
> As being subtle, and of every shape:
> And as they dance about, fit places finde,
> Such Formes as best agree, make every kinde
> And thus, by chance, may a New World create:
> Or else predestinated to worke my Fate. (*PF,* 5)

Catherine Wilson and Judith Elaine Walker suggest that this change took place in 1655 (with the publication of *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*), while John Rogers insists it happened, almost instantaneously as a 'startling scientific conversion', in 1663 (with the revised edition of *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*).[114] However, there is evidence of her ambivalence towards atomism in the earliest expressions of her natural philosophy (cited in the extract above), as well as in the style and method of her texts, as will be discussed in the next section. With the publication of *Observations* in 1666, then, Cavendish had abandoned atomism completely in favour of fully-fledged vitalist materialism; the tenets of her materialist universe remain, but this time the 'self-motion' of matter is free and voluntary (*OUEP,* 47). This would counter Hobbes' suggestion that matter could only move in response to external stimuli. That opinions on the date of her 'conversion' to vitalism vary between scholars may indicate that the move was not as wholesale as Rogers would have it, but was, in fact, already in progress in 1653.

One must acknowledge the turnings of Cavendish's complex natural philosophy in order to not only understand the content of her oeuvre, but its wider philosophical intent and, in that, the impact this had on her view of herself as a creator.
Despite her early descriptions of an atomistic cosmos, she distinguishes herself from Hobbesian mechanism (where uniform matter is thought to interact through fixed laws

[114] Catherine Wilson, 'Two Opponents of Material Atomism: Cavendish and Leibniz', in Pauline Phemister and Stuart Brown, eds., *Leibniz and the English– Speaking World* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), pp. 35– 50, (p. 40); Judith Elaine Walker, 'Torment to a Restlesse Mind': An Analysis of Major Themes in *Poems and Fancies* (1653) by Margaret Cavendish' (Birmingham University: 1996) found at eTheses Repository, p. 115, <http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/3148/> [accessed January 2019]; Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution*, p. 183.

of motion) and instead allows for variety and chance. In the passage quoted above, atoms are self-moving, 'dancing' in what appears to be a fluid and unregimented fashion. Their motions create and destroy matter in meetings both harmonious and incongruous, much like Lucretius' 'perpetuall skirmishies' in a fortuitous chaos. One might ask: if these atoms dance, who provides the melody? From her first text, Cavendish engages with the notion of an animating spirit, a music-maker, an idea that would develop throughout her career into expressions of an entirely sentient natural world in which 'not onely Animals, but also Vegetables, Minerals and Elements […] are endued with this Life and Soul, Sense and Reason' (*PL,* sig. C1r).[115] Previously snubbed for its eccentricity, *Poems and Fancies* should thus be viewed as an exercise in experimentation; replicating the atomic fizz of matter in motion, the poems and prose pieces 'dance', mingling ideas, themes, forms bound only loosely by their exploration of the author's own cosmos, a world of her own imagining. In it, the mind – overlooked by her contemporaries – is the central concourse for her analogical play, likened to a garden, a feast, even the Cartesian organ. Her belief in vitalist energy pervades and, to some degree, justifies the form and matter of the work itself. Like much of her early writing, it is decidedly lacking in form, a reflection of Cavendish's world-view, which rested on the arbitrary movement of matter.

[115] Her early references to vitalism as a 'Spirit' is particularly confusing given its materialist context. Her later works, depicting a more nuanced materialist ontology, more clearly describe matter imbued with such a spirit as either 'sensitive' or 'rational' matter (*PPO,* sig. C4r). For more, see Deborah A. Boyle, *The Well– Ordered Universe: The Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 69.

Chapter Three

The Hunt and the Kill: Cavendish's 'Wild' Method

i. Wat and Woman: Cavendish's 'Free and Noble' Style

Chapter two has begun to deconstruct Cavendish's literary 'cosmos' and, in particular, its creation in her necessarily capricious female imagination. Indeed, her ambitious venture into authorship necessitated a negotiation with traditional values, the upshot of which was a recalibration of the factors that determined her womanhood: Cavendish appears to reclaim the weaknesses that held back members of her sex – namely, their lack of education and their consequently crude and chaotic creative output – in an unabashed demonstration of her imagination's ability to summon a world from nothing. This chapter will continue to discuss this negotiation, focusing particularly on how the tension between compliance/subversion and power/powerlessness is borne out in her work, before exploring how this tension catalysed her adoption of the melancholic persona.

Firstly, one might look to how such chaos manifests itself in her writing. Like atoms, Cavendish's thoughts 'dance' with vitalistic energy; the same metaphor appears in *Philosophical Fancies,* the companion piece to *Poems and Fancies* published in the same year, in which Cavendish opens with a series of epistles addressed to her own mind. In 'An Epistle to my Museful Thoughts', she apostrophises her ideas, asking that

they 'trouble not the *Soule* with falling out', but rather 'with the *Muses* dance in measured feet,/ Taking out all the Fancies as you meet' (*PhF,* sig. B1v – B2r). The work of the male writers she admired (or, at least, recognised) employed the same device to address the dead or to personify abstractions; for example, Jonson dubbed Shakespeare, 'Soul of the Age!', while Donne addresses the Sun and Death.[1] Cavendish, in accordance with her habit for introspection, uses this rhetorical tool to address a part of her own self as though it is a detached and separate agency. As such, the epistle suggests that its author is in some way submissive to the whim of her thoughts and fancies. This chapter will trace this dialectic of control and freedom, discussing its ramifications for Cavendish's creative method; her early intimations of powerlessness informs her depiction of herself as a melancholic creator, in which the act of creating is both cathartic and pathological. As Lyn Bennett suggests, the idea that she is at the behest of her imagination informs her organic writing method. For Cavendish, the act of composition is not 'a unidirectional transition from thought to work', but one in which 'writing and thinking are reciprocally enabling'.[2]

[1] Ben Jonson, 'To the Memory of My Beloved, the Author, Mr. William Shakespeare, and what he hath left us' in *Mr William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies. Published according to the True Originall Copies* (1623), sig. A4r; John Donne, 'The Sun Rising' and 'Death Be Not Proud' in John Donne, *John Donne: The Major Works,* ed. by John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 92 and p. 175. For Cavendish and Donne, see Lara Dodds, ''Poor Donne Was Out': Reading and Writing Donne in the Works of Margaret Cavendish', *John Donne Journal,* 29 (2010), pp. 133-74 and Dustin D. Stewart, 'Death-Weddings or Living Books: Cavendish Rewriting Donne' in John Rumrich and Stephen M. Fallon, eds., *Immortality and the Body in the Age of Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 187-203.

[2] Lyn Bennett, *Women Writing of Divinest Things: Rhetoric and the Poetry of Pembroke, Wroth and Lanyer* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2004), p. 15.

In the latter half of her career, the concept had little changed. Her autobiography details how, once she initiates the creative process (when 'some of those thoughts are sent out in words'), her ideas take over and make their own arrangements: 'they give the rest more liberty to place themselves in a more methodical order' (*NP,* 384). In the conflict between order and impulse that ensues, the latter triumphs: 'for the brain being quicker in creating than the hand in writing […], many fancies are lost, by reason they oft-times outrun the pen' (*NP,* 384). The impressions of her mind await their release before being 'sent out in words', tumbling in a 'ragged rout' onto the page (*NP,* 384). Just as atoms may 'dance' – independent of governance, but rather self– governing – so do Cavendish's thoughts wield their own peculiar power independent of their mistress.

As discussed briefly in chapter two, Cavendish's conformity to fixed rules of rhythm and metre is secondary to her use of poetry as an imaginative medium. Indeed, each thought dictates its own metre, or dance step:

> Let those that sober, sad, a *Pavin* measure,
> *Corantoes* are the *lighter Fancies* pleasure. (*PhF,* sig. B2r)

Truly, Cavendish's words mimic their given rhythms: the pavane, a slow ceremonial dance common in early modern Europe, often had a duple metre with the stress falling on the second beat of the pair; the Baroque coranto or courante, on the other hand, was

characterised by a triple metre and running, jumping steps.[3] These rhythms are accurately replicated in the beat of these lines, the polarisation of which conveys the precariousness of Cavendish's own style (if it might be called 'style', given her attempts here to separate it from herself as a self-conscious mode of expression). Her pen is at the whim of her thoughts, which guide the sentiment and step of her work. Her unsophisticated, capricious method makes manifest her seeming lack of mediation as her thoughts 'fall out' onto the page. And yet in *Poems and Fancies,* Cavendish actively calls for a style that is 'Easie, free' and 'wild', one which purposefully evades the impediment of fixed rules of rhyme and rhythm, and instead 'runs wild about/ *It* care not where' (*PF,* 110). One might question, then, to what extent Cavendish takes accountability for her unconventional method. Indeed, her work stages a conflict of authorial responsibility and/or self-consciousness, in which the notions of power and powerlessness, purpose and passivity are at odds. And yet, her claims that her poetry creates itself *ex nihilo* (with Cavendish a mere vessel) still fittingly conforms to her desire for a style 'that Nature frames' in all its chaos, in contrast to 'Art' with its tedious pedantry (*PF,* 110). Though the two ideas seem to contradict one another – one shunning responsibility, and the other claiming it – they actually bolster and strengthen her position as a comprehensively intuitive poet by bringing the free will of her thoughts and her poetic manifesto in line.

[3] Roger Matthew Grant, *Beating Time and Measuring Music in the Early Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 72; Carmen Dörge, *The Notion of Turning in Metaphysical Poetry* (Münster: LIT, 2018), p. 269.

This dialectic of control and submission can be seen in the construction of her works themselves: *Poems and Fancies*, for example, is divided into sections by lyrical 'Claspes' that act as transition pieces from one fancy to another. In accordance with her use of spinning imagery, a 'Claspe' refers to a frame used to hold loose ends of cotton or flax together.[4] These pieces can therefore be seen as a figurative attempt to tidy up her work, tying up its loose ends. It is appropriate, then, given her attempts to understand the workings of her mind, that each of the four claspes ruminates on the poet's brain and its operations: the text's first 'Claspe' details a chaotic, but entirely natural creative process in which Cavendish's thoughts,

> [R]un out of *Breath*, then down would lye,
> […] When *Time* had given *Ease,* and lent them *strength*,
> Then up would get, and run another *length.* (*PF,* 47)

The next 'Claspe' fittingly moves to a poem on 'The Hunting of the Hare' in which the animal, named Wat, embodies Cavendish's fancy. Like her own thoughts, Wat is charged with an animating spirit, which fuels his running from place to place to evade his captures; his movements follow a similar pattern of rest and running, 'Thus resting all the *day*, till *Sun* doth set,/ Then riseth up, his *Reliefe* for to get' (*PF,* 110). However, the episode ends in a dramatic crescendo: 'like those that dying are, think health returns', Wat dies 'patiently', having cleaned his face of 'dirt and sweat' and 'wip'd his Ears so

[4] 'claspe', *n*. (1.b(e)) 'A frame for holding loose ends of cotton, flax, etc., together in the process of spinning', *Oxford English Dictionary*, *OED* < http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/33862 > [accessed January 2019].

cleane/ That none could tell that [he] had hunted been' (*PF,* 111). His inevitable death is a noble one, marked by a 'consort' of horns and voices (*PF,* 112).

As has already been noted, a significant part of Cavendish's challenge to Cartesian dualism was her belief that animals shared a certain degree of knowledge that should be acknowledged and respected by humans. Here, she reclaims the perspective of the seemingly 'weaker' creature, adopting the subject position of the conventionally passive party:

> Man is so Proud, that he only thinks to Live,
> That God a God-like Nature him did give
> And that all Creatures for his sake alone
> Were made, for him to Tyrannize upon. (*PF,* 113)

The trajectory of Man's tyranny stretches from animal cruelty to patriarchal abuse; here, 'all Creatures' includes not only the hare, but also women – Cavendish alludes to Genesis and Man's creation in the image of God with Woman made 'for his sake alone'. As Nigel Smith suggests, while the hare 'has the free style' to which Cavendish aspires, as the subject of oppression, he also denotes 'the plight of a woman as an author'.[5] It appears that Cavendish felt an affinity to Wat as a member of the 'lesser Sex', both of them are

[5] Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England 1640– 1660* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 258– 9.

subordinated to Man for having supposedly inferior rational capabilities.[6] The hare cannot overturn the hierarchy of power – the hunted must be captured – but regardless, his fate is one marked by dignity and pride.

Cavendish's empathic connection to Wat informs her decision to embrace her own unconventional style with the same magnanimity. Elsewhere in *Poems and Fancies,* Cavendish finds the hare a fitting parallel, noting that, 'according to the constitution of my *Sex,* I am as fearefull as a Hare' (*PF,* 167); the animal is an ideal avatar through which she makes known the pressure she experienced as a woman in a man's world. In his study of the motif, Smith continues to take the author at her word, identifying the 'unremittingly sad and painful' tale of Wat as the figure of Cavendish's own angst.[7] Yet, as the syntax suggests, the first clause predicating the second, Cavendish's gender determines her feeling: she is deemed fearful *because* she is a woman and 'according to' what was expected of her sex, not because she *is* scared. What Smith interprets as a tragic metaphor is actually a political comment consistent with Cavendish's ambition to be 'Margaret the First'. In fact, the quotation forms part of a larger rebuttal, prefacing

[6] It should be noted that Descartes did not answer the woman question directly. In fact, his dualistic approach is enterprising in its gender– neutrality. Genevieve Lloyd argues that the fact that his *Discourse* is written in the vernacular rather than Latin is evidence of Descartes' interest in reaching a female audience (Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 45). One might argue, then, that Cavendish's argument here is against the established institutions that prevented such parity (discussed in section 2). Women like Cavendish were no doubt attracted to Descartes' non– binary theory; that he did not definitively suggest lesser reasoning faculties in women bolstered proto– feminist speculations, see Hilda Smith's *Reason's Disciples: Seventeenth Century English Feminists* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982) and Ruth Perry's biography of Mary Astell, *The Celebrated Mary Astell: An Early English Feminist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

[7] Smith, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 259.

her '*Epistle* to *Souldiers',* to those men who 'may justly laugh at me, if I went about to censure, instruct, or advise in the valiant Art, and Discipline of Warre' (*PF,* 167). Such behaviour was not expected of a woman, 'having no knowledge in the Art, nor practise in the use' (*PF,* 167). She eschews the masculine domain of war, but she does so only to invoke another, writing: 'these *Armies* I mention, were rais'd in my *braine,* fought in my *fancy,* and registered in my *closet*' (*PF,* 167). Unable to experience it, she may, and must, imagine it: her battles will be fought on the page. The image would seem to confirm Cavendish's appropriation of the femme forte persona. Again, womanhood bolsters Cavendish's writing strategy, informing and permitting not only her venture into text, but also her frenetic and unruly means of doing so.

Like a woman versus male captors, the hare may represent the female author, outnumbered and potentially vulnerable, but its death marks a triumph for Cavendish's method. If the hare is interpreted as the manifestation of her fancy, its honourable death – welcomed with the sounding of hunting horns – celebrates the ecstatic moment of creation. One might recall here the use of death (more specifically, 'die') as a poetic metaphor for sexual climax in the work of sixteenth and seventeenth– century men. Both Shakespeare and Donne, amongst many others, were known to employ the 'la petite mort' motif, once thought to diminish the vital essence of a man.[8] Indeed, Galenic medicine held that semen was made of reconstituted blood; as blood was the humour most conducive the life, the 'evacuation' of it during sex brought the subject closer to

[8] Jan Kott, *Memory of the Body: Essays on Theater and Death* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1992), p. 88.

death.[9] It is possible that Cavendish – whose poem reworks Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* from the perspective of the hare, from which she gets the name Wat – invokes the notion of the 'little death', replacing the male sexual climax with a female alternative in which poetic creation serves as the acme of her mind's restless whirring.

The hunt is perhaps the most accurate portrayal of Cavendish's 'free and noble stile', infringing on gender boundaries just as it does stylistic ones. Rather than displaying the *plight* of the female author, as Smith would have it, Cavendish's hare is empowered in its moment of weakness. Cavendish, too, represented by the hare is empowered by what might initially be her disadvantage, her gender. As Edward Berry suggests, during the hunt, the 'tenderness, compassion, timidity' associated with womanhood are simultaneously 'suppressed and […] joined in tension with the traditional male attributes of strength, fierceness and courage'.[10] The internalisation of the hunt in Cavendish's own mind thus enacts a hermaphroditic blend of hunter and hunted in which the vulnerability of 'woman' is thrown off, captured and slaughtered in favour of a virile creative pursuit:

> I Contemplating by a Fires side,
> In Winter cold, my Thoughts would hunting ride.
> And after fancies they do run a race,

[9] Jennifer Pacenza, "None Do Slacken, None can Die': Die Puns and Embodied Time in Donne and Shakespeare' in Judith H. Anderson and Jennifer Vaught, eds., *Shakespeare and Donne: Generic Hybrids and the Cultural Imaginary* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), pp. 61– 84 (p. 62).
[10] Edward Berry, *Shakespeare and the Hunt: A Cultural and Social Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 38.

If lose them not, they have a pleasant Chase.

If they do catch a Hare, or kill the Deere,

They dresse them strait in Verse, and make good cheere. (*PhF,* sig. B1v)

Again, this time in her early companion piece, *Philosophical Fancies* (1653), the hare reappears as a fitting metaphor. The hunt brings the hare's 'race' to an end when it is then 'dresse[d] strait in Verse'. Here, 'dresse' is doubly suggestive: in the context of the hunt, it implies the preparation of a carcase for cooking or eating but might otherwise refer to the guiding or steering of an object 'in a particular direction'.[11] To dress 'strait', in a similar way, denotes a direct or unswerving route or passage.[12] In this passage, the hare and deer, the prey, represent some kind of creative stimuli; once captured by Cavendish's thoughts, this stimuli is augmented and prepared for consumption through poetry. The hunt, particularly the capture and kill, is the moment of creation as the poet's mind encapsulates both predator and prey in a peculiar tension between power and powerlessness.

The creative process is, then, an over-spilling of ideas that dart, like the hare, from brain to page. Cavendish faces an overweening impulse to imagine, create and record her thoughts, too many thoughts, it seems, for her mind to contend with:

[11] 'dress, *v*. (2.a.) 'To cause (a person or animal) to move in a particular direction; to direct, guide, steer. Also: to turn (one's face, back, etc.) in. particular direction', *Oxford English Dictionary*, *OED* <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/57672> [accessed June 2019].

[12] 'straight, *adj.*, *n.*, and *adv.* (3.a.) 'Direct, undeviating. (a) Of a way or course: Leading directly to its destination; not deviating or circuitous', *Oxford English Dictionary*, *OED* <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/191142> [accessed June 2019].

When I did write this *Booke,* I took great paines,
For I did walke, and thinke, and breake my Braines.
My thoughts run out of *Breath,* then downe would lye,
And panting with short wind, like those that dye. (*PF,* 47)

Taken from the first claspe, this extract makes clear the similarities between her and Wat. The parallels are striking: the breathless running, panting, and eventual 'death' (or imagined death as it features in Cavendish's work). Their shared fear and grief does, however, culminate in poetry. The dialectic of control and freedom is thus resolved as power – here, the power to create – is found in powerlessness, in the hunted animal and in the woman. Cavendish details an exhaustive process of creation that results in a birth/death paradox. Her imaginative thoughts come to fruition at the cost of their creator's sanity (or in Wat's case at the cost of his life), though accompanied by tangible relief. She appears to suffer for her art: despite its pained passage to print, the creative process serves as a cathartic expulsion of chaotic energy.

ii. Monarchs and Magistrates: The Liberal Imagination

Cavendish's deliberation about, and defence of, her writing method is then an essential aspect of her own paradigm of womanhood. In her essay on Cavendish's imagination, Bowerbank warns Cavendish's readers against the association of contradiction, fancy and vanity, an 'anarchic formlessness', exclusively with the

feminine.[13] Such a picture, she claims, perpetuates the idea that the female imagination is some sort of 'literary ghetto'.[14] One might argue, however, that this is what Cavendish seeks to do. Her mind is separate and apparently autonomous. Her womanhood motivates her singular creative endeavour: it is *because* she is a woman, her brain being filled with those 'Fantastical motion[s]', that she can produce the work she does. The accretion of images used throughout her oeuvre, indeed in her first text alone – atomic chaos, the singular woman, the original spinner – reinforces the idea that her mind is an exclusive, closed space enigmatic to those on the outside. Nonetheless, unlike the ghetto, she is more than equal: she is both free from the foibles of her sex – a bold, educated woman – and is simultaneously the embodiment of what is, to her, essentially feminine, an imaginative creator. A mixture of both hunted and hunter, she is not just a woman, but a woman set apart as particular. Moreover, her 'anarchic' method reflects her vitalist philosophy, which upheld a chaotic, lawless method of creation, the stability and perpetuity of which relied on opportunity and chance – a strange stance for a Royalist Duchess whose position rested on the maintenance of order and hierarchy. This section will therefore extend the previous discussion of the power dynamic at work in Cavendish's texts. How did her representation of the mind and its operations – in particular, the imagination's ability to overwhelm, or out-run, the rational faculties – reflect her view of contemporary power structures and her place within them as an insubordinate woman?

[13] Bowerbank, 'The Spider's Delight', p. 17.

[14] Ibid.

Though John Rogers arguably misplaces Cavendish's transition from atomism to vitalism as a 'startling scientific conversion' in 1663, there is great validity in his suggestion that her move to vitalism is driven by a 'republican organisational logic'.[15] Compared to the hierarchy of mind over body proposed by Descartes and the fixed laws of motion offered by Hobbes, Cavendish's theory engages with egalitarian ideals in its equivalence of the material mind and body, and liberal ones in its preference for frenetic 'dance' over mechanism. If Hobbes' belief in stable, permanent rules reflects his staunch monarchism, then Cavendish's faith in the opposite might, despite her Royalist connections, imply her support for republican ideologies. Indeed, Cavendish's theory of 'matter' posed three different types: 'inanimate' matter and 'animate', which was then divided into 'rational' animate matter and 'sensitive' animate matter. Of rational and sensitive matter, the latter was presumed to be the less refined due to its dealings with the corruptible senses, whereas rational matter – though capable of the same 'dance' of self-willed action – was confined to the mind.[16] Despite this hierarchical arrangement, Cavendish stipulates that 'all degrees of Only and Infinite matter are Intermixed', thus, all matter is attributed with sense *and* reason. John Rogers maps this philosophy onto Cavendish's political stance; her theory lacks a singular monarchical ruler, instead '[h]er decentralised yet hierarchical system of material government resembles nothing so much as the republican Puritan ideal of the rule of the godly few'.[17]

15 Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution,* p. 200.

16 Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish*, p. 59– 60.

17 Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution,* p. 198.

Rogers goes further to suggest that Cavendish's natural philosophy of rational matter also incorporates her 'interest in female emancipation'.[18] Cavendish does not indicate an unambiguous or sustained correlation between her philosophy and her claims about gender, although it was common in the work of her contemporaries to do so. As Deborah Boyle suggests, the Hobbesian notion that 'there can be no cause of motion, except by a body contiguous and moved' can be, and was, mapped onto the comparison of men and women in the early modern battle of the sexes.[19] Hobbes' suggestion that even the smallest unit of matter undergoes a journey of perpetual conquest, continually 'relinquishing one place, and acquiring […] another', was seen to aggrandise the implicitly masculine (active) force at the cost of the feminine (passive) matter.[20] The idea was not limited to Hobbes; William Harvey similarly lauded the 'vital energy' of the male semen at conception.[21] By comparison, the female egg was 'mere matter'.[22] Carolyn Merchant writes that for Francis Bacon, too, 'as for Harvey, sexual politics helped to structure the nature of the empirical method', particularly in reference to the domination of the male discipline of science over Mother Nature.[23] The supposed passivity of female matter in these natural scenarios was used to legitimise the subjugation of women in the contemporary hierarchy of gender.

[18] Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution*, p. 202.

[19] Deborah Boyle, 'Cavendish's Nonfeminist Natural Philosophy', *Configurations,* 12.2 (2004), pp. 195– 227 (p. 218); Thomas Hobbes, *Elements of Philosophy, the first section concerning body* (London: R. and W. Leybourn, 1656), p. 90.

[20] Hobbes, *Elements of Philosophy,* p. 79.

[21] William Harvey, *Works* (London: Sydenham Society, 1847), p. 299.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Caroline Merchant, 'Dominion Over Nature' in Muriel Lederman and Ingrid Bartsch, eds., *The Gender and Science Reader* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 68– 82 (p.72).

As discussed in chapter two, Cavendish's dalliance with proto-feminist ideas is not sustained throughout her oeuvre, though it did not prevent her from experimenting with them. One might, as Rogers does, look to determine if Cavendish distinguishes matter by gender in the same way that her male contemporaries do. To support his claim, Rogers cites her suggestion that men are more 'able to endure Hard Labour', while women are 'not so active in Exercise' and not able to 'bear Weighty Burthes [*sic*], nor to run long Jornies'. Women, she concludes, will never be 'so strong as the strongest of Men' (*TWO*,sig. A5r). This position has ramifications for Cavendish's reproduction of Hobbesian displacement in *Poems and Fancies*:

> Life is a *Fire*, and burnes full hot,
> But when *Round watry Atomes* power have got:
> Then do they quench *Lifes Atomes* out,
> Blunting their *Points,* and kill their courage stout.
> Thus they sometimes do quite thrust out each other,
> When equall mix'd, live quietly together. (*PF,* 14)

In this extract – if the brute force of sensitive matter is identified with masculinity and the relatively passive rational matter with femininity – Cavendish's reference to the 'thrusting out' of atoms intimates the seemingly violent supplanting of the female with the male to such an end as to 'quench Lifes Atomes out'. Rather, she offers a profoundly egalitarian solution: to 'live quietly together', male and female should be 'equall mix'd'.

Rogers is one of many Cavendish scholars who had interpreted her natural philosophy as overtly proto-feminist. Her privileging of rational (feminine) matter over sensitive (masculine) is an obvious correlation. So, too, is her suggestion that 'the Rational parts can move in more various Figurative Actions than the Sensitive; […] so that the Mind can please it self with more variety of Thoughts than the Sensitive with variety of Objects' (*GNP,* 58). If, as Anne Thell writes, 'fancy is a voluntary quickening in the motion of the rational parts of the mind that occurs independently of environmental triggers', then, according to Cavendish, the imagination can operate without the stimulation of the senses and sensitive matter.[24] And so, her role as a 'creatoress' comes full circle: the imagination can function without the influence of masculine sensitive matter.

The issue, however, lies in the patriarchal power structures within which she *must* operate – after all, Wat does not and cannot evade his captures, his death is an inevitable consequence of Man's tyranny. One example, if not *the* example, of a structure in which this oppression is encoded is in the education system as discussed in Cavendish's early play, *The Female Academy* (1662). Central to her concerns in the play is 'whether women are capable to have so much Wit or Wisdome as men' (*P,* 654). Throughout the early modern period, the classical learning of all-male institutions functioned as part of the glue that held male society together, thereby deliberately excluding women: 'if literary practitioners are men of position, by definition trained in the classics', women could not practise literature 'for the simple reason that they never

[24] Anne Thell, *Minds in Motion: Imagining Empiricism in Eighteenth– Century British Travel Literature* (Lanham: Bucknell University Press, 2017), p. 51.

did, except for the two ancient Greek monsters, Sappho and Corinna'.[25] This attitude is iterated by the Academy's 'Grave Matron' who, in her lesson on oratory, perpetuates a definitive gender bias – Wit is female and Wisdom, male. While Wisdom is stable, attended by Truth, Reason and Understanding,

> Wit is wild and various, and so are women, and Wit is busie and meddles with every thing, cause, or subject, so do women; Wit is fantastical, and so are women, Wit is always in extremes, and so are women. (*P,* 656)

By reason of their gender, the Lady Speaker suggests, women lack the 'quick Apprehension, rare Conceptions, elevated Fancy, and smooth Elocution' of their male counterparts (*P,* 656). To all 'outward appearance', women have 'a natural Antipathy' to Wisdom 'which makes them uncapable' of parity (*P,* 656). And yet, though her words chime with that of contemporary male educators, her style does not display the vulgarities of wit so apparently typical of her sex, but instead the understanding and elocution they should lack. The Lady thus undoes her own lesson, through which Cavendish maintains that the fallacy of female inferiority is driven by custom, rather than by nature.

Of course, as discussed in chapter two, Cavendish's proto-feminist leanings have their limits. Indeed, Sarasohn suggests that 'Cavendish certainly was not a feminist, if

[25] Robert Adams Day, 'Muses in the Mud: The *Female Wits* Anthropologically Considered', *Women's Studies,* 7 (1980), pp. 61– 74 (p. 68).

feminism is taken to mean the empowering of *all* women' (emphasis mine).[26] In general, women are not 'so strong as the strongest of Men' and 'the wisest Woman is not so wise as the wisest of Men', she writes (*TWO,* sig. A6r). As an exception to this, however, she offers herself, in which the male/female dichotomy is internalised. This idea is encapsulated in an episode of *Sociable Letters* (1664), in which Cavendish recalls the 'several Sights and Shews' of 'Carneval Time' during her exile in Antwerp (*SL,* 407). In her article on Cavendish's 'Continental Influences', Sara Mendelson claims that the 'sumptuous aestheticism' of the Flemish city helped to expand her imagination, its 'continental ambience […] diametrically opposed to [its] counterpart in contemporary England'.[27] Often thought to be a precursor to the epistolary novel, *Sociable Letters* contains 211 fictional letters detailing various aspects of seventeenth-century society including marriage, war, medicine, fashion. The epistolary form throws off Cavendish's accountability as narrator; the female persona, or letter-writer, presented cannot be unproblematically associated with Cavendish herself (though this is made all the more complex by the inclusion of the initials 'M.L', which correspond to Cavendish's own maiden name, Margaret Lucas). Despite this issue, her real and textual selves undoubtedly bear a great resemblance in this text, with her real experiences in Antwerp serving as a catalyst for these imaginative ruminations.

[26] Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish,* p. 191.

[27] Sara H. Mendelson, 'Concocting the World's Olio: Margaret Cavendish and Continental Influence', *Early Modern Literary Studies: A Journal of Sixteenth– and Seventeenth– Century English Literature,* 14 (2004), paragraphs. 1–34 (paragraph. 20) <http://purl.oclc.org/emls/si– 14/mendconc.html> [accessed January 2019].

The carnival provided a fitting analogy for Cavendish; as Sarahson writes, it was here that 'monstrosities and oddities' were no longer the object of ridicule, but where 'all the chief of the Town goe to see and be seen, likewise all strangers of what quality soever' (*NP,* 386).[28] The profound social levelling catalysed by the carnival, where outsiders and oddities migrated from the peripheries to the centre of attention, found its way into Cavendish's work, in which the reader hears from Wat, the hunted hare, and not his captors. Using the carnival analogy, Cavendish figuratively decentralises conventional power structures, giving voice to typically passive parties. In the letter concerned, Cavendish is particularly enraptured by the performance of a 'Woman and her Fool, her husband', whom she reportedly watched daily from her room next to the stage. When the local magistrates ask the players to vacate, Cavendish is able to recall the act, performed now not on the physical, but the imagined stage:

> [T]o please me, my Fancy set up a Stage in my Brain […] and the Incorporeal Thoughts were the several Actors, and my Wit play'd the Jack Fool, which pleased me so much, as to make me Laugh Loud at the Actions in my Mind […] but after my Thoughts have Acted, Danced and Played the Fool, some several times of Contemplating, my Philosophical and Physical Opinions, which are as the Doctors of, and in the Mind, went to the Judgement, Reason, Discretion, Considerations, and the like, as to the Magistrates, and told them, it was very Unprofitable to let such idle Company be in the Mind, which Robbed the multitude of Thoughts, of Time and Treasure; whereupon the Magistrates of the Mind Commanded the

[28] Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish,* p. 26.

> Fancy-Stage to be taken down, and the Thought-Actors to go out, and would not suffer them to Cheat, or Fool any longer. (*SL,* 408).

Cavendish's mind is equally adept in its mastering of rational and sensitive matter; her Wit, that which constructs the imagined stage, does not run wild as was deemed typical of her sex. Indeed, her mind also possesses the conventionally masculine 'Judgement, Reason, Discretion, Considerations' to keep it in check. She therefore offers herself as one in which desirable male and female qualities are 'equall mix'd', governed by a magisterial, rather than a monarchical, internal government. Though she delights in her wit, her reasoning faculties – the 'Magistrates of the Mind' – call an end to proceedings.

The episode demonstrates Cavendish's potential to possess the hermaphroditic qualities of creativity and restraint; and yet, the intervention of 'Reason' is itself a product of her wit. One might suggest that Cavendish intends to demonstrate her ability to regulate the male and female aspects of her mind. It is little coincidence, then, that one of the players that so fascinated Cavendish in the Antwerp carnival is a woman who acts 'a Man's part, she did it so Naturally as if she had been of that Sex' (*P,* 407). When in the guise of a man, 'she would Caper Higher, and Oftener than any of the Men', and when she 'Danced after the Fashion of her own Sex', she did so with ease (*P,* 407). The persona in *Sociable Letters* is equally proficient in the functions of both sexes. As such, the relationship between Reason and Imagination in Cavendish's work is not as definitive as her contemporaries would have it, nor are their associations with men and women, respectively. In Milton's *Paradise Lost,* Reason is the highest faculty, the 'chief' to whom all others obey; while fancy 'forms imaginations, airy shapes', Reason, 'joining and

disjoining, frames'.[29] By comparison, Cavendish's *Sociable Letters* does not upturn this hierarchy, but it does – in Roger's words – decentralise it. In the persona's mind, the male and female faculties have their own share of power. The relationship between fancy and reason in Cavendish's oeuvre is thus far more nuanced than Milton allows; rational and sensitive matter commune 'like the Father and the Son':

> For though the Father rules by command, and the Son obeies through obedience, yet the Father out of love to his Son as willing to please him, submits to his delight, although it is against his liking. (*PhF,* 36–7)

Again, she muddies the power/powerlessness dynamic in a profoundly secular reimagining of the paternal bond, though it flirts, perhaps blasphemously, with Christian ideologies. While the established hierarchy would suggest that Reason, like the father, holds sway, Fancy is able to lure him to indulgence. Their relationship is described in progressively amicable and amenable terms as 'a strong *Sympathy*, an agreement, or *Affection*' (*PhF,* 36).

The potential for fancy to overrule reason proved concerning to the luminaries of seventeenth-century England. Todd Wayne Butler writes convincingly of Hobbes' anxiety that 'to understand – let alone employ – the imagination was to gain access to

[29] John Milton, Alastair Fowler, ed., *Milton – Paradise Lost* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007), p. 287 (V. 102); (V. 105– 6).

power'.[30] In *Leviathan,* Hobbes suggested that allowing subjects to act upon their own imaginations would encourage conflict between their own consciences and the objectives of the government. For him, imagination was 'nothing, but decaying sense'. When the corrupted machinations of the fancy become 'compounded' – producing fictitious figures and scenarios – the individual might be dissuaded from reality:[31]

> From this ignorance of how to distinguish Dreams, and other strong Fancies, from Vision and Sense, did arise the greatest part of the Religion of the Gentiles in time past, that worshipped Satyres, Fawnes, Nymphs, and the like; and now adayes the opinion that rude people have of Fayries, Ghosts, and Goblins; and of the power of Witches.[32]

According to Bacon, too, poetical works, as the vehicles of the imagination, become the agent of distraction and subversion, but also most notably, freedom. It is this freedom, from patriarchal repression or Hobbesian displacement that is so important to Cavendish, to such an extent that it pervades her philosophy of the universe and its creation and, thus, the creation of her own world on the page.

[30] Todd Wayne Butler, *Imagination and Politics in Seventeenth– Century England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p.3.

[31] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme, and Power of a Common Wealth, Ecclesiasticall and Civil* (London, 1651), p. 5.

[32] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 7.

One might take issue with Bowerbank's claim that Cavendish's association with 'anarchic formlessness' is necessarily detrimental to her reputation.[33] In fact, Cavendish may well be celebrated as one who wields chaos at the hands of a liberal 'magistrate'. Her work thrives on the resulting tension between power and powerlessness, reason and imagination, control and freedom. This tension might perpetuate Bowerbank's suggestion that the female imagination, as it manifests in Cavendish's work, is a literary 'ghetto'. Though the term 'ghetto' brings with it troubling connotations of impoverishment and neglect, the idea that Cavendish writes for or with a particular group in mind is a valid one. Perhaps a more appropriate term would be 'coterie', a small, exclusive group united over common interests.[34] Of course, the term 'coterie', as a self-selecting group, is one which, given the lack of evidence of Cavendish's readership circle, is itself problematic, but nonetheless more appropriate: while entry to the ghetto was forced, a coterie was entered into voluntarily. She recommends that 'those who cannot find the *conceit* of my *Fancies*, […] ask a *Poet* where the *conceit* lies' (*PF,* 122). Only fellow poets, or at least those who register the necessary disorder inherent in poetry, will be able to decipher her periphrastic style. In doing so, Cavendish designs a guileful way to overcome her critics – they cannot understand her style as they do not share the same intuitive ability to create *ex nihilo*. With her method of composition predicated on the agitation, if not the deposition, of conventional power structures,

[33] Bowerbank, *Reading Early Modern Women,* p. 17.

[34] For more, see Arthur Marotti, *Manuscript, Print and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018) as well as Marotti's study on John Donne, *John Donne, Coterie Poet* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986).

Cavendish constructs a 'ghetto', a segregated space or a little world, where her ideas are to be assimilated and understood.

Indeed, one such critic was Ralph Cudworth, who evaluates her ideas in his own philosophical work, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678), published shortly after her death. Though Cudworth does not refer to Cavendish by name, Jacqueline Broad suggests that the philosophy he presents is 'unmistakeable' as that of the Duchess.[35] He rejects 'the *Mundane System'* she developed in her natural philosophy, 'conceived to arise, from a certain Jumble of these *Three several sorts* of *Matter,* as it were scuffling together in the Dark, without a God'.[36] As a fellow Royalist, Cudworth condemns the notion that 'these innumerable Particles of Matter, do all Confederate together' in 'a Common-wealth of Percipients and Persons' as 'Absurd and Ridiculous'.[37] He, no doubt, found Cavendish's method to be too radical. As Line Cottegnies writes, that Cudworth would include a reference to her thoughts, however implicit, in his treatise is testimony to how outlandish, subversive and visible they were deemed to be.[38]

Cavendish's vacillation between polarised structures of authority continued throughout her career; in *Natures Pictures,* she claims that 'the Monarchical Government of Bees is as wise and as happy as the Republick Commonwealth of Ants'; both are

[35] Broad, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century*, p. 87.

[36] Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London, 1678), p. 137.

[37] Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, p. 839.

[38] Line Cottegnies, 'Brilliant Heterodoxy: The Plurality of Worlds in Margaret Cavendish's Blazing World (1666) and Cyrano de Bergerac's *Estates et Empires de la lune* (1657)' in Sarasohn and Siegfried, eds., *God and Nature in the Thought of Margaret Cavendish,* pp. 107–120, (p. 120).

natural and effective methods of rule (*NP,* 286). Cavendish's most evocative depiction of monarchical rule is that of the Empress of *The Blazing World* (1666), who promptly discovers that the absolute power to create freely is only possible in the mind. The Empress is urged to replace the laws and rules of her kingdom with the immaterial creations of the imagination:

> For every human creature can create an immaterial world fully inhabited by immaterial creatures, and populous of immaterial subjects, such as we are, and all this within the compass of the head or skull. (*BW,* 96)

Troubled with 'the cares that attend Government', she creates instead a world of her own so as 'to enjoy all both in whole and in parts, without controle or opposition; and may make what World you please, and alter it when you please' (*BW,* 97). As with the Antwerp Carnival episode in *Sociable Letters*, the Empress' disenchantment with (and, ultimately, her lack of absolute power in) the outside world catalyses its transposition from reality to the imagination, a movement that Catherine Gallagher has neatly summarised as the replacing of 'roi absolu' with 'moi absolu', the individual imagination.[39]

The episode involves a moment of incarnation, of turning inward, in which the real is exchanged for the imaginary. The self, or more specifically, the mind, becomes the stage. This process is one that punctuates Cavendish's oeuvre; a feeling of

[39] Catherine Gallagher, 'Embracing the Absolute', p. 25.

disenchantment with the world outside triggers the formation of a world *inside*. As Sidonie Smith suggests, if 'banishment is every women's natural political condition', the imagination allows both Cavendish and her textual surrogate to become 'in miniature what Charles II was on a grander scale during the years of […] exile: an absolute monarch without a country'.[40] But, without a country to rule, is a monarch really a monarch? In Cavendish's work, there remains a puzzling dialectic between control and freedom that spans both republican and monarchical ideologies. As the previous two chapters have shown, one may resolve this by suggesting that the crux of Cavendish's endeavour is to create and to create without negotiation, repression or restraint. Her desire to be considered singular, to be 'Margaret the First', fuelled her pursuit for pseudo-monarchical power, and yet, her want and need to be as individualistic and eccentric as she pleased in this pursuit demanded an autonomy which, for a woman, seemed only possible in a reformist setting. Indeed, the revised model of womanhood presented in Cavendish's oeuvre allowed for her parity with her male contemporaries, if only inside the mind.

[40] Sidonie Smith, ''The Ragged Rout of Self': Margaret Cavendish's *True Relation* and the Heroics of Self–Disclosure' in Anita Pacheco, ed., *Early Women Writers 1600– 1720* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 111–147 (p. 139).

Chapter Four

Gnats and Flies: Cavendish and the Pathological Imagination

i. Hades and Elysium: The Nature of Inspiration

For Cavendish, the cost of the freedom to create was the inability to be taken seriously. The idiosyncrasies in her work, bolstered by her 'antic' dress and masculine mannerisms, fuelled a misinterpretation of her boldness as madness – she would be known as 'Mad Madge', not 'Margaret the First'. And more than that, as Peter Burke writes, Cavendish's role as a Duchess carried further consequences for her socio-cultural displacement: 'perhaps one could see [noblewomen like Cavendish] as mediators between the group to which they belonged socially, the elite, and the group to which they belonged culturally, the non-elite'.[1] Might the multiple, often contradictory, voices in her work be a manifestation of this middle-space, on the periphery of society, of womanhood, of sanity? As Lee Cullen Khanna has written, Cavendish's work is marked by a peculiar 'struggle' for recognition. Adopting the role of an early she-philosopher, Cavendish was a woman in a man's world; her place in the literary tradition, regardless of how alternative her trajectory may be, is assured only through the reconstruction of that tradition. The following two chapters of this study will explore this idea more thoroughly, focusing on the effect that Cavendish's gender had on her opportunity to exploit these opportunities and convince her peers of her ability as a bona-fide poet and

[1] Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 55.

she-philosopher. Her brazen celebration of an equally ambitious and capricious womanhood with its chaotic, singular subjectivity asks why a woman should be denied access to a tradition in which illness empowers the imagination, the tradition of 'genial melancholy'. Her account of the creative process, both inspirational and painful, holds a mirror up to the society in which she lived, throwing light on the limits of its tolerance and its boundaries for change.

The most recognisable means by which Cavendish sought to both set herself apart from her antecedents *and* engage and invite their critical responses to her work is through her presentation of gift copies to various persons of import. Of this, she gives particularly significance to the minds of 'the two universities', Oxford and Cambridge. In *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, a prefatory letter addresses the institutions directly. Women, she writes, 'are kept like birds in cages to hop up and down in our houses, not suffered to fly abroad to see the several changes of fortune' (*PPO,* sig. B2v). Thus, she continues, 'wanting the experience of nature, we must needs want the understanding and knowledge and so consequently prudence, and invention of men' (*PPO*, sig. B2v). Amid her unwieldy hypotactic prose, Cavendish couches the basic principles of her struggle for recognition; while she wishes to rebel against the avian image, to do so requires the approval of her keepers, her male peers. Though she may try to push boundaries, she must stay behind the line. Her frustration is typified in the conflict of 'wanting' and 'want'. Though 'want' may well define the weaker sex, made of Adam's rib, lacking in 'learning or understanding, wit or judgement' and a 'rational soul', it also defines Cavendish's desire, her 'want' for fame. As with her earlier texts, her

pretensions to modesty quickly deteriorate – her ambition is 'not unnatural, though unusual' (*PPO,* sig. B2v).

In his own copy of Cavendish's *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (now held in the Huntington Library), the poet-politician Edmund Waller (1606 – 1687) taunted Cavendish's method: 'New Castles in the air this Lady builds,/ While nonsense with Philosophy she guilds'.[2] The disparaging pun on the then– marchioness' title was not coined by Waller, but adapted from the correspondence between Cavendish and Bishop John Wilkins (1614 – 1672). A warden at Wadham College, Oxford and then at Trinity College, Cambridge, Wilkins took a keen interest in experimental philosophy and most likely discovered Cavendish through her gifts of her own books to each of the universities.[3] Concerning the publication of his scientific tract, *A Discovery of a World in the Moone* (1638), Cavendish reportedly questioned him on how she might visit: 'as the journey must needs be very long, there will be no possibility of going through it without stopping by the way'.[4] To this, Wilkins replied, 'your grace can be at no loss for places to stop at, as you have built so many *castles in the air*'.[5] The record of this exchange is only found in Henry Kett's *The Flowers of Wit* (1825), a collection of 'bon mots' or witticisms organised in alphabetical order by their originator, from Alexander the Great to Wilkes. Kett, a fellow of Trinity College, Oxford, might have heard the anecdote as it passed

[2] Henry Ten Eyck Perry, *The First Duchess of Newcastle and her Husband as Figures in Literary History* (Boston: Ginn and Co, 1918), p. 179n.

[3] John Henry, 'Wilkins, John' (1614– 1672), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ODNB* <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/29421> [accessed January 2019]].

[4] Henry Kett, *The Flowers of Wit, Or a Choice Collection of Bon Mots, Both Ancient and Modern,* Volume 2 (London, 1814), p. 96.

[5] Ibid.

through the university's rumour mill, though Waller's version of it one hundred and fifty years earlier is testimony to its veracity. Indeed, Waller's knowledge of the exchange suggests his connection to Wilkins (both had substantial links to Cambridge University, and were each connected to Oliver Cromwell by way of marriage and may well have met through the Cromwellian court). Regardless of the nature of its development, the pun proves that Cavendish was evidently an object of ridicule amongst learned circles of men.

Cavendish took the opportunity to respond to her critics in *Sociable Letters*, with her writing persona less than convincingly distanced from the subject of one particular letter, 'M.L'. Here, the persona suggests that,

> In your last letter, you were pleased to tell me you were invited to a meeting where many ladies and gentlemen were, and amongst their several discourses the Lady M.L spoke of me, saying I lived a dull, unprofitable, unhappy life, employing my time only in building castles in air […] [A]s for the mind's architecture as castles in the air or airy castles, which are poetical conceptions and solitary contemplations which produce poems, songs, plays, masks, […] and the like, they will be more lasting than castles of wood, brick, or stone. And their architecture if well designed and built will be more famous and their fame spread farther than those of stone (*SL,* 226–7)

Though voiced through her textual interlocutor, Cavendish takes the opportunity to confront her critics who, like Waller, would mock her writing strategy; these insults are

instead reappropriated and embraced in line with her authorial manifesto. Indeed, Cavendish's need to construct 'castles of air', unable to display her authority in the real world, is reconfigured as the most appropriate means to garner the fame she craved. The letter-writer spurns the 'gossiping life and […] light heels' of her aggressor, supporting the idea that Cavendish was the subject of contemporary rumour. It is little coincidence that the next letter in the volume contains Cavendish's own sustained critique of Shakespeare (*SL,* 227). As Katherine Romack and James Fitzmaurice note, Cavendish was not just the first woman to comment on Shakespeare's work, but the first person, man or woman to offer a 'sustained evaluation of [him] as playwright'.[6] Despite an ostentatious defence of her method against their smears, then, the letters are equally keen to appeal to her more critical readers who, just as much as her imperishable 'castles', could determine the quality of her lasting reputation.

Cavendish's pilgrimage from reality to imagination (as was discussed in the previous chapter) may be the locus of her creative ability, her own particular power, but it is also where this power is potentially undone. Indeed, her attempt to fulfil her ambition to be 'Margaret the First' – to dominate her own portion of literary history as a celebrated creatoress – is as troubling as it is inspiring: 'to seek about for that you cannot finde,/ Shall be a *Torment* to a restlesse *Mind*' (*PF,* 154). While her imagination provides some temporary relief, allowing her to create a world of her own creation, Cavendish's disenchantment with the real world is the root of such torment; she is unsettled, Judith Elaine Walker maintains, by 'the inability of the rest of the world to rise

[6] Romack and Fitzmaurice, eds., *Cavendish and Shakespeare,* p. 2.

to her vision', a vision in which she is a viable contributor to the literary canon.[7] This lack of connection between her observing self and participating self (or perhaps more appropriately her imagined 'self' and real-world self) is used both as a sign of her creative abilities and as a symptom of something darker, predicated on a hazardous disassociation from reality, or rather a prioritisation of the imaginary. As has already been discussed, there are times at which Cavendish *seems* unable to control her narrative. Her loosening grip on such 'intentionality' facilitates her presentation of an overactive, perhaps even troubled, fancy informed by a natural philosophy which imbues such 'rational' matter with its own determinacy.

Even in her first text, *Poems and Fancies,* the mind – or at least what she can determine of it – is a marginal space, blurring divisions between control and anarchy, conscious and unconscious, even heaven and hell:

> […] *Memory,* the *Ferriman*, doth bring
> New company, which through the *Senses* swim
> The Boat, Imagination's always full,
> Which *Charon* Roweth in the *Region* Scull,
> And in that *Region* is that *River Styx,*
> There some are dipt, then all things soon forgets. (*PF,* 141)

[7] Walker, 'Torment to a Restlesse Mind', p. Synopsis.

Using classical imagery to describe the individual consciousness, 'The Brain is the Elysian fields; and here/ All Ghosts and Spirits in strong dreams appeare', Cavendish demonstrates her learning with a morbid image. The mind is configured as an unknowable space of mythic proportions, encompassing both Elysium and Hades. In the midst, the poet's thoughts are precarious; memories, thoughts newly deceased, sail through the brain escorted by the imagination and encouraged by the senses. Cavendish's model follows that of early modern medicine – propounded by Francis Bacon and Robert Burton amongst others – which held that the imagination occupied a material but equally enigmatic place in the brain, its 'middle cell', surrounded by the faculties of sense, reason and memory, facilitating communication between them.[8] While the memory stockpiled images derived from sense impressions, the imagination differed in its ability to create images without an immediate sensory stimulus. Able to create without a perceived muse or sensory trigger, the faculty was often associated with an anarchic, and therefore potentially dangerous, ability to create from nothing. Thus, Cavendish's interpretation of the poet's journey to creation is a treacherous one. The Styx marks the boundary between the world of the living and the world of the dead at which her fancies can either reach their fruition or sink to oblivion. The poet's mind, encompassing the Styx scene, similarly teeters on the brink of transcendence and a vacuous underworld that annihilates thoughts to nothing. Poetry is produced at the interface of these multiple borders, along this 'River Styx', as a mark of the poet's ability to negotiate the perilous journey.

[8] Burton, *Anatomy,* 1.1.3.1, p. 46.

Cavendish endeavours, strongly and persistently, to convince her reader of this inner conflict to the point of 'normalising', or rather naturalising, the mind in a state of flux. As is a common theme with Cavendish's oeuvre, the very thing she is admonished for (here, her female, and consequently, inconstant mind) is reimagined with intrinsic power:

> Nature hath not onely made Bodies changeable, but Minds; so to have a Constant Mind, is to be Unnatural; for our Body changeth from the first beginning to the last end, every Minute adds or takes away: so by Nature, we should change every Minute, since Nature hath made nothing to stand at a stay, but to alter as fast as time runs; wherefore it is Natural to be in one Mind one minute, and in another the next. (*TWO,* 162)

Again, Cavendish is interested in what is, and is not, 'natural'. Her words sanction a natural order informed by the principles of Heraclitean flux (centered on the oft-quoted maxim, 'You cannot step twice into the same river'). Towards the end of her career, Cavendish cites Heraclitus as an inspiration for her appreciation of flux: 'Heraclitus is of opinion, that contraries are in the same things […] there are not only real, but also apparent or seeming contraries in nature, which are her irregularities' (*OUEP,* 41). In the same section, she offers an example of madmen 'who think their flesh is stone […] Neither the flesh, nor stone […] are changed from their own particular natures; but the motions of human sense in the sentient, are irregular, and make false copies of true objects' (*OUEP,* 42). The example might anticipate Michel Foucault's description of the madman who, imagining he is made of glass, believes he is fragile and 'must touch no

object which might be too resistant'.[9] Though the initial hypothesis is lunatic, the reasonings are not wholly irrational. Rather, 'they apply correctly the most rigorous figures of logic'.[10] There is, then, a logic – or a thread of sense – in the inconstancies of nature, even in madness. Thus, while Cavendish's relishing of flux is not new or ground-breaking for her time, it does stands in opposition to a contemporary appreciation for a delineable and fixed order of things, elucidated and explained by empirical evidence. The inexplicableness of the mind, in particular, provides an ideal canvas for Cavendish to explore her natural inclination for chaos.

Her mind's disquiet may be 'natural', but it is not without suffering. Her creative ability is 'a great delight and pleasure' to occupy her 'idle hours' and, perhaps most tellingly, a 'disease' (*OUEP,* sig. C1r–v). In this tension between productivity and destruction, creativity and chaos, Cavendish offers her own petition to the 'troubled writer' paradigm: she writes because she must ease her restless mind, but the very act of writing only leaves her further disturbed. Like small gnats, fancies 'buz in the *Braine*':

> […] they do sting so sore the *Poets Head,*
> His *Mind* is blister'd, and the *Thoughts* turn'd red.
> Nought can take out the burning heat, and paine,
> But *Pen,* and *Ink,* to write on *Paper* plaine. (*PF,* 151)

[9] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 89.
[10] Ibid.

Though peculiar, the analogy is deliberate, drawing on a rich literary history in which the distracted imagination was attributed to imaginary flies and their offspring stinging, wounding or otherwise irritating the brain. In his 1685 collection, *Maggots,* Samuel Wesley confounds the connection. Though, for Wesley, the creature 'bites' rather than 'stings', the impact on the would-be poet is the same: 'The Maggot bites, I must begin:/ Muse! Pray be civil! Enter in!'[11] Like Wesley, Cavendish's poet could be deemed a 'maggoty-headed' individual – capricious and given to fancy. John Fletcher's *The Spanish Curate* (1622), too, uses the maggot-fly motif; in the play, the 'maggot-pate' is both 'whimsical' and 'shatter-brained', bringing inspiration and infection.[12]

Though the analogy seems unusual to the twenty-first-century reader, it was evidently well-used amongst Cavendish's generation of writers.[13] In the early seventeenth century, prevailing wisdom held that maggots appeared spontaneously from rotting meat, proving that life could spring from a non-living thing. During Cavendish's lifetime, Francesco Redi (1626–1697), an Italian naturalist and poet, challenged this notion of 'spontaneous generation', but his efforts to counter the folkloric belief that 'mere excremental maggots, bred/ In poets' topsy-turvy head[s]'

[11] Samuel Wesley, *Maggots, or, Poems on Severall Subjects Never Before Handled by a Scholar,* (London, 1685), p.1.

[12] Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, 'The Spanish Curate' in *The Works of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, Volume the Second* (London, 1711), pp. 469– 552 (p. 520).

[13] 'maggot, *n*. (2.a.) 'A whimsical, eccentric, strange, or perverse notion or idea. Now *arch.* and *regional*', also (2. d.) 'Fancifulness. *Obselete, rare*' and (3.) 'A whimsical and capricious person. *Obselete*', *Oxford English Dictionary*, *OED* < http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/33862> [accessed January 2019].

failed.[14] Just as Cavendish purportedly creates *ex nihilo,* so too do maggots and flies arise from nothing; like the insects, she has her reader believe that her thoughts, her creativity, bloom extemporaneously without a direct cause. Alongside this image of an instinctual self–sustaining creativity, there is an insinuation that, if maggots sprout from rotting flesh, then, the whimsy they represent must also be accompanied by a similar form of degeneration. Indeed, maggots are born out of decay – without such decay, there would be no maggots. The flourishing of the imagination must therefore be accompanied by a similar deterioration (like the man of glass, perhaps, the precision of logical deduction becomes impaired, if not abandoned completely) leaving the mind simultaneously enthused and tormented.

Cavendish deviates from her predecessors by appropriating the idea for herself; it is not an insult to be maggot-headed, as it is elsewhere, but rather a form of self-diagnosis, anticipating Wesley's use of maggots as muse. The fly is a peculiar source of inspiration; as Steven Connor writes, its flight was spasmodic, its characteristic buzz was not 'articulated air […] but mere, mindless agitation'.[15] In 1695, the anonymous author of the treatise, *Scala Naturae,* notes that the fly is the '*Nexus Naturae vegetabilis & sensitivae*, the Link which unites the Vegetable and Sensitive together'.[16] In the ontological chain of being, then, the creature spans the lower regions of the vegetative

[14] Mary Thomas Crane, *Losing Touch with Nature: Literature and the New Science in Sixteenth Century England* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2014), p. 215n; Robert Lloyd, *The Poetical Works of Robert Lloyd,* ed. by William Kenrick, Volume 2 (London, 1774), p. 51.

[15] Steven Connor, *Fly* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), p. 173.

[16] Anon., *Scala Naturae: A Treatise Proving Both From Nature and Scripture The Existence of Good Genii, or Guardian– Angels. In a letter to his much honoured friend, J.B of C. Esq.* (London, 1695), p. 14.

and the sensitive, with both surpassed by the intellectual realm. By association, one might assume that the maggot-headed individual would also be deemed lesser than those free from the creatures. Indeed, the presence of the fly signals a decay of sanity that, in its extreme, connects the 'mad man' to the unrefined and bestial. Why would Cavendish willingly embrace such an idea? Her appropriation of the maggot/fly motif encapsulates the tension of her writing endeavour; regardless of her desire to publish and disseminate her thoughts, she intends to make known the coincident burden of her imagination. Her use of the trope is a bold attempt to be considered as a member of a tradition that linked the intemperate fancy to heightened, even genial, creativity.

Indeed, in 1759, Horace Walpole wrote that Cavendish's brain was diseased with 'cacoethes scribendi' (adapted from Juvenal's 'tenet insanabile multos scribendi cacoethes'), defined in *Spectator* No. 582 as 'a hard Word for a Disease called in plain *English*, the Itch of Writing'.[17] The supposed ailment was not uncommon, but was 'as Epidemical as the Small-Pox'. Britain, in particular, was 'very much afflicted with this Malady'.[18] And, it seems, the ailment had a long history: in his Seventh Satire, Juvenal also writes of the 'incurable itch of writing' that took possession of many, 'and grows old in their sick hearts'.[19] With no foreseeable cure, the itch could only be soothed 'by forbidding him the use of Pen, Ink, and Paper'; if not heeded, it could lead to insanity.[20]

[17] Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele, eds., *The Spectator: With Notes, and a General Index, The Twelve Volumes comprised in two,* Volume 2 (New York, 1826), p. 355 – No. 582, Wednesday, August 18, 1714.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Quoted in Catherine Keane, *Juvenal and the Satiric Emotions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 97– 8.
[20] Addison and Steele, *The Spectator,* p. 355.

As her reference to the buzzing of gnats in the brain suggests, Cavendish's own creative process is not measured or in need of nurturing. She does not require any period of gestation in order to align and develop her thoughts, as Jonson might, publishing 'not 'bove once a year'. Instead, it seems that she writes as those possessed with a fury unconstrained by traditional values. Once 'infected', Cavendish must attempt to keep her thoughts in check 'with a *Strict dyet*' of 'ease, and rest and quiet', in case they might run again 'with swifter speed,/ And by this course new Fancies they could breed' (*PF,* 47). Her thoughts are the cause of the disease, which must either be starved of stimuli or let out onto the page: 'But I doe feare they're not so Good to please,/ But now they're out, my Braine is more at ease'. Writing is thus both a poison and a curative tonic.

There was, however, an unflattering, derisive undertone to Walpole's diagnosis. The voracious itch, as he presented it, was not a noble ailment but one of the poetaster, who pumped out doggerel verse that only they deemed worthy of publication. In the same *Spectator* article, the author bemoans that the prevalence of the 'itch' had undermined 'the art of printing […] which should prove detrimental to us' as it is used by such pretenders 'to scatter prejudice and ignorance'.[21] The press, another writes, 'teem[s] with a more redundant and complicated farrago of productions than ever'.[22] This issue was not unique to Walpole's age, but also features in Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* around a century earlier, in which Burton similarly disparages

[21] Ibid.

[22] Quoted in Paul Keen, *Literature, Commerce, and the Spectacle of Modernity, 1750– 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 92 from the anonymous, *London Unmask'd, or the New Town Spy. Exhibiting a Striking Picture of the World as it Goes* (London: William Allard, 1784).

the 'itching humour, that every man hath to shew himselfe desirous of fame and honour', so that he will 'write no matter what, and scrape together it bootes not whence'.[23] Though it may be cynical to align Cavendish with these 'base and illiterate scriblers' that clogged the presses, she did, like them, seek to establish a 'paper kingdom' and leave a legacy to 'get [herself] a name'.[24] In fact, Walpole's diagnosis is, on first reading, decidedly tame when compared to those who viewed Cavendish's work as an insult to decorum: Charles North, writing in 1667, is merciless in his connection between her want for publicity and open sexuality: 'The Dutchesse Newcastle is all ye pageant now discoursed on: Her breasts all laid out to view at a playhouse with scarlett trimd nipples'.[25] For women, too, Cavendish was vain and conceited for finding her voice worthy of a public audience. After visiting Cavendish and her family in London, Mary Evelyn wrote to her friend, Dr Bohun, that she was 'surprised to find so much extravagancy and vanity in any person not confined within four walls'.[26] Walpole's view therefore acknowledges Cavendish's prolific authorship, her 'itch' to write and publish, while simultaneously undermining it. For North and Evelyn, her critical error or hubris was her audacious self-assurance, but Walpole renders this hollow. Given the history of criticism that precedes and surrounds his use of 'cacoethes scribendi', he views

[23] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy*, p. 7.

[24] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy,* 6th Edition (London, 1651), 'Democritus to the Reader', p. 6.

[25] Taken from a letter from Charles North to his father, 13 April 1667 (Bodleian MS North C.4, fol. 146) and quoted in Susan Wiseman, *Drama and Politics in the English Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 93.

[26] 'Letter of Mary Evelyn to Ralph Bohun c. 1667' quoted in Bowerbank and Mendelson, eds., *Paper Bodies,* p. 91.

Cavendish as a vain-glorious pretender – in Burton's words, she is equivalent to those who, 'bewitched with this desire of fame' are not 'better scholars, but greater praters'.[27]

Walpole's indictment might relegate Cavendish from poet to poetaster, but regardless if Cavendish was a pretender to a wider tradition of 'infected', troubled writers, her case is still important, if not more important, for its litotes-ike presentation of the traits she deemed necessary to 'qualify' for membership. Anna Battigelli's study of Cavendish notes her insistence on the variety of the inner life, 'the powerful inchoate feelings and affinities and fears which dispute with us the control of our lives'.[28] And while this may chime with a modern concern for the nuances of consciousness, one must be careful not to determine Cavendish's motives with the benefit of hindsight and a twenty-first-century consciousness. In fact, Cavendish's attempts to understand the extent of her control over her own mind have a more pressingly early modern relevance in the tradition of melancholy. To analyse her idiosyncratic interpretation of the melancholic tradition, one might begin with an exposition of the condition itself: what definitions were available to Cavendish and what symptoms did she present? Moreover, how did she believe that the illness affected her mind, in particular, her imagination: did she believe that melancholy facilitated the creative process in any way?

ii. Recipes and Receipts: The Portland Manuscript

[27] Burton, *Anatomy* (1651), 'Democritus to the Reader', p. 6– 7.

[28] Battigelli, *Exiles of the Mind,* p. 114.

The definition of melancholy is complicated by its notorious history as a protean disease. In the case of Cavendish's melancholic experience, this study relies primarily on two distinct sources. The first is the most encyclopaedic source of seventeenth-century ideas on the condition, Robert Burton's extraordinary compendium, *The Anatomy of Melancholy.* While the *Anatomy* will provide theoretical and cultural perspective, the second source – a Cavendish family manuscript containing various medical receipts and correspondence from several physicians – will provide biographical and familial context. The comparison of these source texts will elucidate the presentation of her mind's murky underside and allow one to discern both the reality and fiction behind her self-presentation as a writer burdened with her talent.

By the debut of Cavendish's writing career in 1653, the *Anatomy*, initially published over thirty years earlier, had been through six different editions, each expanding in length. Mary Ann Lund, author of *Melancholy, Medicine and Religion in Early Modern England: Reading* 'The Anatomy of Melancholy', has studied 25 copies of the text held in Oxford libraries and three seventeenth-century British Library manuscripts, finding 75% of these annotated with various readers' markings. These doodles ('dashes, crosses, hash-signs, manicules, flowers, asterisks and underlinings') are, as Lund suggests, evidence that the text did not sit untouched, but was read and engaged with consistently.[29] There is no direct evidence that Cavendish would have read the *Anatomy* as the record of books held in Welbeck Abbey's library suggests that the family did not own a copy, though this cannot be considered conclusive. There is,

[29] Mary Ann Lund, *Melancholy, Medicine and Religion in Early Modern England: Reading* 'The Anatomy of Melancholy' (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 198.

however, ample evidence to suggest social connections between Burton and both William and Charles Cavendish; again, it cannot be confirmed if the men met directly, but they did share associates, notably, Thomas Hobbes and the cleric and academic, Robert Payne (1596 – 1651). Indeed, Payne annotated a copy of Thomas Hariot's *Artis analyticae praxis* with 'A gift from the most noble Sir Charles Cavendish, 18 [/28] December 1631'[30]. Seven years later, Payne became a canon of Christ Church, Oxford, which is no doubt where he met Burton, whose will contains a codicil to 'good Mr Paynes'.[31] It is believed that Payne introduced Hobbes and Burton, who gifted copies of their work to one another.[32] As the previous chapter demonstrated, the family's intellectual milieu afforded many social connections through which knowledge was passed from person to person, especially from Newcastle to Margaret, or from Charles to Margaret. It is certainly possible that Newcastle knew of Burton's work and shared this with his wife.

Whether or not Cavendish knew Burton's text directly, the treatment of melancholy therein proved an important influence on seventeenth-century English culture and served to gather the multifarious views of the disorder in the period. In a subsection on the 'Definition of Melancholy', Burton begins by asserting that the 'disease denominated from [a] material cause', which he names 'black Choler', harking back to

[30] 'Ex dono nobilissimi Equiti Caroli Cauendysshe Decemb. 18 1631', quoted in Noel Malcolm, ed., *The Correspondence of Thomas Hobbes,* Volume 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 873.
[31] 'Ex dono nobilissimi Equiti Caroli Cauendysshe Decemb. 18 1631', p. 875.
[32] Noel Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 95– 6. It should be noted that the 'Six Degrees of Francis Bacon' website does not account for any of these connections, despite their contemporary paper trails.

the cold bile of Galenic humoral theory.[33] Extending an earlier system established by Hippocrates around 450 BCE, Galen suggested that melancholy was the result of an overproduction of black bile, a sediment of the blood. According to Galen, every individual carried a small quantity of black bile in their bodies; however, the humour was liable to excess and those who failed to regulate its superfluity would be expected to experience introversion, anxiety, despondency as well as constipation, arthritis and poor circulation, all caused by a general slowing of bodily functions due to the bile's viscosity.[34]

It is these mental symptoms that trouble Burton most; his sprawling prose grasps at various explanations from a dizzying multitude of sources, 'Dotage, or Anguish of the minde'; 'a commotion of the minde […] the Phantasie and Brain', a corruption of 'some one principal facultie of the mind, as imagination, or reason'.[35] Indeed, he suggests that it easier to define melancholy by 'what it is not, then what it is'. Ultimately, then, Burton condenses his thoughts into the following definition, by which melancholy is termed:

> [A] kinde of dotage without a feaver, having for his ordinary companions, feare, and sadnesse, without any apparent occasion.[36]

[33] Burton, *Anatomy,* 1. 1. 3. 1, p. 45.
[34] Jamison, *Touched With Fire,* p. 204.
[35] Burton, *Anatomy,* 1. 1. 3. 1, p. 46 – 7.
[36] Burton, *Anatomy*, 1. 1. 3. 1, p. 46.

Such fear and sadness were inseparable characteristics of the condition and frequently occured 'without any apparent occasion'. It should be noted that Galen's theory, on which Burton muses, was not without its challenges, most significantly that of Andrea Vesalius, who identified and published a paper on around two hundred errors in Galen's theory in 1543. Moreover, in 1628, William Harvey had proven that blood circulated via the heart and was not, as Galen believed, produced by the liver and absorbed by the body.[37] However, the continuing popularity of Burton's text is evidence that, regardless of its challengers, for the early modern reader, Galen's theory provided the most convincing exposition of the disease.

Another fundamental source on Cavendish's melancholy that supplements the information gleaned from the *Anatomy* is a casebook held in the Portland Welbeck collection at the University of Nottingham archives. The collection includes the papers of the Cavendish family from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. Of concern here are the papers relating to the family between 1563– 1707, the descendants of Sir Charles Cavendish (1552– 1617) of Welbeck Abbey, Nottinghamshire, the third son of Sir William Cavendish and his wife, Elizabeth ('Bess of Hardwick'), and of these papers, those of Charles' eldest son, William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle upon Tyne (1592– 1676). There are more than 220 original letters in the collection including receipts for legal and travel expenses as well as transcribed copies of petitions and warrants. From the evidence held in the archive, it is clear that the family were careful in their administrative duties, in particular, storing copies of outgoing letters for posterity and

[37] Peter Mitchell, *The Purple Island and Anatomy in Early Seventeenth-Century Literature, Philosophy and Theology* (Cranbury: Rosemont Publishing, 2007), p. 340 – 1.

their own future reference. This was not unusual for the household of seventeenth-century landed gentry who wished to order their estate. John Evelyn (1620– 1706), for example, was renowned for such a practice, copying around 810 of his letters between 1644 and 1698, which he sent to some of the brightest minds amongst his circle of contemporaries, including Margaret Cavendish.[38]

Of all the papers in the Portland collection, the item concerned here is one titled 'Booke, wherein is Contained Rare Minerall Receipts Collected at Paris from those Who hath had great Experience of them'.[39] The 'Booke' contains a multitude of medicinal recipes, receipts of prescriptions given to the Cavendish family along with various letters between Newcastle and several different physicians. Though the manuscript is referred to in the work of both Mendelson and Sarasohn as evidence of Cavendish's melancholy, which is seemingly confirmed by the doctors therein, the text has not been analysed at length and in correlation with (both to support and undermine) claims made in Cavendish's canon as to the extent of her melancholic condition. As will be discussed in the remainder of this chapter and the one to follow, Cavendish's role in the creation of the manuscript is uncertain. Archivists at the University of Nottingham have ascertained

[38] Douglas Chambers, ''Excuse These Impertinences': Evelyn in his Letterbooks', in Frances Harris and Michael Cyril William Hunter, eds., *John Evelyn and his Milieu* (London: British Library, 2003), pp. 21– 36 (p. 21).

[39] University of Nottingham., Portland Manuscripts MSS PwV.90, 'Booke, wherein is Contained Rare Minerall Receipts Collected at Paris from those Who hath had great Experience of them', The University of Nottingham, 'PwV – Literary Manuscripts in the Portland (Welbeck) Collection, 16th – 19th centuries', PwV 90, http://mss–cat.nottingham.ac.uk/DServe/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=PwV%2f90&pos=39 [accessed January 2019].

that the letters within the text are transcribed in the hand of Thomas Farr, Newcastle's ward (who would go on to produce the weekly account book for Henry Cavendish, Newcastle's son, copying letters between him and John Beaumont and bearing witness to his will in 1691).[40] A pencil annotation on the opening folio of the text reads: 'Title page and many entries in the handwriting of Thomas Farr. Some pages in that of Wm. Cavendish Duke of Newcastle', however, this note is undated.[41] The letters that Farr transcribes can be identified by their heading with third-person titles, such as such as 'A Letter from Sir Thomas Cademan to the Lord Marquisse of Newcastle'; another suggests that the following letter concerns 'the health of his lady'. These are in contrast to three letters in the final section of the book, in which the perspective (and handwriting) changes, for example, the headnotes detail 'the Collicke in *my* Stomack' or 'Sir Théodore Mayerne advice for *My* lady and *My* selfe' (emphasis mine). It has been presumed, then, that these letters are instead transcribed by Newcastle himself.[42] It would seem that Margaret Cavendish is only a subject of the manuscript, not its creator; regardless, it is a valuable resource on the Cavendish family that offers a comparatively objective view of her life and character through the lens of medicine and without the loaded influences of patronage or contempt.

There is not much known about the origins of this specific text, only regarding the Portland Welbeck papers in general: the manuscript is amongst many acquired from

[40] These letters are also held in the Portland Collection at the University of Nottingham, i.e. Pw 1/400 and Pw 1/549.

[41] 'Booke', fol. 1v.

[42] One can compare the handwriting found in this document with other items in the archive purportedly written by the Duke, i.e. Pw 1/331, Pw 1/406 and Pw 1/666.

the papers of the library of the Dukes of Portland, who resided at Welbeck Abbey from 1716, when the title was first created. During the peerage of William John Arthur Charles James Cavendish-Bentick, 6th Duke of Portland (1857– 1943), the family library was extended and its previous contents re-organised. This included the identification and rebinding of the family papers, the book of 'Rare Mineral Receipts' being one of them. This would then explain why the manuscript is bound, or has rather been rebound, in nineteenth-century burgundy Moroccan leather and its front and rear pastedowns decorated with a Victorian marble paper. One might then wonder if the gathering and ordering of the material in the text is original, or the work of the later Duke: is the text a series of jottings and letters that the Duke of Portland compiled in the 1870s from assorted self-contained papers, or is it a deliberate ancestral text that he simply rebound?

Its composition only complicates this question. There are many instances in which the letters transcribed move from the recto of one folio to the verso of another, which might imply that the paper was already folded into quires at the time of writing. Moreover, the manuscript is 196 folios long, though folios 33–36 and 119–94 are left blank, the inclusion of which was evidently preserved despite its nineteenth-century curator. As the archival records attest, the book forms a small part of what appears to be a large-scale, systematic process of transcription across the family's entire library.[43]

[43] This might include copies of petitions and warrants concerning the Duke of Newcastle's estate at Welbeck Abbey and land in Sherwood Forest, transcriptions of incoming, outgoing and drafted letters as well as various papers relating to the general running of the household: 'A list of the servants paid by the Marquess of Newcastle; 1661', 'The perticulers of household provisions Spente in a quarter of a yeare', 'A note of what Beefe, Mutton, Veale, Lambe, Pigge, etc. is spent daylye in my Lordes famaelie' (The

There is ample evidence to suggest this formal intent, such as the headnotes that demarcate each recipe and letter, and the notable lack of corrections or general editing (in comparison to what might be seen in a working notebook, such as the medical casebooks of physicians such as Richard Napier (1550 – 1634) or Théodore Mayerne, for example).

The structure of the manuscript is, however, comparatively arbitrary; the medical notes are variously intermingled with the transcribed letters and folio numbers added in a modern hand (this study will follow the modern system in its own folio references).[44] After some initial notes on remedies including 'Salt of Steele' and the 'Antimoniall Cup', the letters begin at folio 7 and continue until folio 51, where there is an extensive assortment of medical recipes such as 'The Earle of Chesterfields […] Diaphoreastick Powder' and 'Robert Askins his medicin for a Cough'.[45] Around folio 99, the letters resume, largely focused on those between William Cavendish and his main physician, Sir Théodore Mayerne. The dating system used is equally inconsistent – only some of the letters are dated (or more likely, post-dated in Farr's hand) and the haphazardly ordered receipts have decidedly little context. The text itself is not an early modern 'scrapbook' filled with assorted fragments of paper; instead, all 196 folios are made of the same type of French paper measuring 250mm by 180mm, each bearing two watermarks per sheet marked by their use of fleur de lis (one is a coat of arms, the other,

University of Nottingham, 'Miscellaneous letters and papers of William Cavendish, 1st Duke of Newcastle– upon– Tyne, Henry Cavendish, 2nd Duke of Newcastle– upon– Tyne and other family members', MSS Pw 1– /280– 678).

44 A detailed transcription of the manuscript's contents can be found in the Appendix.

45 'Booke', fol. 86r.

a monogram AV).[46] Together with the title's suggestion that its contents was collected in Paris, one can pinpoint the gathering of the material to the family's time in exile from 1644–60 throughout France and the Low Countries – Farr transcribes a recipe for 'medicine against melancholy given mee by a Nun, at Antwerp', for example, which chimes with the family's movements after they left Paris in 1648.[47] However, dating exactly when this material was transcribed is impossible to ascertain.[48]

There is, then, some degree of purpose to the text, a once empty notebook turned 'receptaria'. Around seventy– eight pages remain blank and the italic hand, though stylistically consistent, differs in size and thickness of stroke from one letter to another. These relative inconsistences would equally imply that, though purposeful, the process of collecting such receipts and remedies was a relatively organic one. Indeed, the infrequent marginalia – 'probatum est!' ('it is proved!') – that, in the tradition of books of this type, appears alongside some recipes, suggests that the text had been used, or was intended for use, as a kind of medical manual.[49] This explanation is also supported by a brief note 'Of Weights' at the back of the manuscript, which lists various units of measurement, such as '16 ounces to the pound and 8 drammes to the ounce'.[50] One

[46] I have not been able to find any matches or similarities in the Gravell Watermark Archive, <https://www.gravell.org>.

[47] 'Booke', fol. 100r.

[48] 'General Information', The University of Nottingham, 'PwV – Literary Manuscripts in the Portland (Welbeck) Collection, 16th – 19th centuries', PwV 90, http://mss–cat.nottingham.ac.uk/DServe/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=PwV%2f90&pos=39 [accessed January 2019].

[49] Kristine Kowalchuk, *Preserving on Paper: Seventeenth Century Englishwomen's Receipt Books* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2017), p. 42.

[50] 'Booke', fol. 195r.

might imagine that the family consulted this when measuring their prescribed doses of medicine.

It would therefore be useful to refer to the manuscript as an example of an early modern 'receipt' or recipe book: 'receipt', here, referring to the 'received' wisdom that filled its folios. These books gave 'English men and women both a space and a method for delineating – or anatomising, in early modern language – their medicine experiences'.[51] There are further connotations linked to the receipt book that may inform discussions on the creation and purpose of the Portland manuscript. Both Sara Pennell and Michelle DiMeo have emphasised the receipt book as an early locus of female authorial power, particularly for upper class women such as Alice Thornton and Lady Sedley, who disseminated medicinal and culinary recipes down the matrilineal line.[52] Lynette Hunter, too, looks at the resurgence of such texts, written by women, pinpointing 1653 as the 'advent of published texts in English by women on these matters' – coincidentally the same year that Cavendish's writing enters the literary marketplace.[53] Amongst these texts were those produced by the sisters Elizabeth Grey and Alethea Talbot, aunts to Cavendish's husband, who published their household

[51] Deborah Harkness, '*Nosce teipsum:* Curiosity and the humoural body and the culture of therapeutics in late sixteenth and early seventeenth century England' in Robert Weston and Alexander Marr, eds., *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 171– 192 (p. 188).

[52] Sara Pennell and Michelle DiMeo, *Reading and Writing Recipe Books, 1550– 1800* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 145, p. 234.

[53] Lynette Hunter, 'Women and Domestic Medicine: Lady Experimenters, 1570– 1620' in Lynette Hunter and Sarah Hutton, eds., *Women, Science and Medicine 1500– 1700: Mothers and Sisters of the Royal Society* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997), pp. 89–107, (p. 105).

'secrets' in 1653 and 1655, respectively.[54] It is highly likely, then, that the Cavendish family, particularly Margaret, would have been aware of the 'fashion' for recording, and then publishing, such recipes. The logging of 'receipts' evidenced a parallel practice that ran alongside the formularies kept by trained practitioners, encouraging self–diagnosis and a flourishing curiosity for domestic therapies.[55] Indeed, throughout the seventeenth century, medical recipe books proved to be one of the most popular genres with London booksellers distributing around 60 new recipe books and overseeing the reprinting of 170 titles.[56] With the publication of these texts, women began to establish a footing, albeit nascent, in the medical field, and more generally, in scientific study; medical recipe books were frequently 'marketed as the treasuries of the noblewoman'.[57] And as the first woman to be invited to the Royal Society in 1667, despite her somewhat egregious reception, Cavendish's contribution to this area (apart from the Portland text, which was never published) was evidently registered by her contemporaries.

Despite the established connection between early modern women and medical texts in seventeenth-century Europe (and even within the Cavendish family itself), in the Portland receipt book, few women feature amongst its contributors. Apart from the unnamed 'nun at Antwerp [sic]', the only other recipe attributed to a woman is 'The

[54] Ibid.

[55] Kathryn King speculates that poet Jane Parker (1652– 1732) may have had her own unofficial medical practice: Kathryn R. King, *Jane Parker, Exile: A Literary Career 1675– 1725* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 70– 1.

[56] Elaine Leong, *Recipes and Everyday Knowledge: Medicine, Science and the Household in Early Modern England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), p. 13.

[57] Ibid.

Countess of Kents Powder'.[58] The Countess, Elizabeth Grey (1582 – 1651), is the same Elizabeth Grey mentioned in Hunter's article cited above, the aunt of William Cavendish and a renowned recipe collector. The Countess' recipes were printed and published posthumously in 1653 (though they remained unattributed to her until the text's 1655 edition) titled *A Choice Manual or Rare and Select Secrets in Physick and Chyrurgery*. As the receipt for her 'powder' appears in the Portland manuscript alongside material gathered in the 1640s, almost a decade before the Countess' recipes were available in print, it is clear that the receipt was acquired via a more informal method of dissemination, such as through personal correspondence. Following its publication in the *Manual*, the Countess' powder gained immense popularity as a 'cure-all' remedy recommended for pox, fevers, colic, labour pains and, of course, melancholy.[59] The recipe is notable for its peculiar list of ingredients, including white amber, 'crab eyes' (secretions from the head of crabs), pearl, red coral and saffron, all of which would be gathered at great expense to the patient. The Portland manuscript's version also adds 'harts horne' and 'the black tippe of crabs claws' which, when combined, make for 'a most excellent cordiall'.[60]

The expense of the Countess' remedy might reflect its invention in the mind of a noblewoman. Indeed, as the Portland text suggests, the Cavendish family consulted various members of their social circle on matters of their health; the Earl of

[58] 'Booke', fol.100r.

[59] Doreen Evenden, *Popular Medicine in Seventeenth– Century England* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988), p. 70.

[60] 'Booke', fol. 87r.

Chesterfield's recipe for 'Diaphoreastick Powder' is included (most likely referring to the 1st Earl of Chesterfield, Philip Stanhope (1584 – 1656)), as well as a receipt from Sir Thomas Aylesbury (1576 – 1657) regarding 'collick in the stomack'.[61] In her biography of William, Cavendish lists Philip Stanhope as the colonel of Shelford House in Nottinghamshire, which he held as a garrison for the king upon the orders of her husband. Similarly, *The Life of William* details how a 'Mr Aylesbury, the only son to Sir Thomas Aylesbury, Knight and Baronet, and brother to the now Countess of Clarendon, a very worthy gentleman, and great friend to my Lord' had lent William £200 whilst in exile, which helped to secure the family home at Antwerp (*LWC,* 63).

The Cavendish family's connections evidently stretched beyond the Caroline court and afforded a rich archive of medical advice. The manuscript may also gesture towards William's familiarity with, or at least, his knowledge of, the self-styled Duke of Northumberland, Robert Dudley (1574 – 1649). Dudley's contribution to the Cavendish's text is significant: included is a tract on how to prepare his 'Cream of Tartar', his 'Great Oyle of Sulpher', his 'Aurum Potabile' as well as evidence of the Cavendish's family's direct correspondence with him through both letters and receipts for more specific treatments, such as 'Spirits of Silver'.[62] Perhaps the most noteworthy recipe is a 'cure-all' supposedly of Dudley's invention: 'The Duke of Northumberlands great cordiall licensted by him selfe and given with admirable successe who believes it the greatest Cordiall in the world and the surest remedy against Poyson and the

[61] 'Booke', fol. 86r.

[62] 'Booke', fols. 38v– 39v, 42r– v, and 46v– 47r.

plague'.[63] This recipe is a potent concoction – supplied with the approval of the 'great Duke of Tuscany' – featuring 'Mastick, Juniper, Rosemary, […] spirits of Sulpher, liquour of silver' and has its own peculiar history.[64]

As the illegitimate son of the first Earl of Leicester, Dudley had failed to establish himself in the Stuart court and so left England for Italy, where he first referred to himself as the 'Earl of Warwick'. In the nineteenth-century edition of Dudley's Italian biography, *Il Duca Di Nortombria* – originally written in 1620 and translated into English in 1645 – his editor Thomas Vaughan credits him with a medical treatise, 'The Catholicon'.[65] Though no copies of the work survive, the knowledge of the remedies listed therein are reported to have endured by virtue of their popularity amongst contemporary patients and physicians alike. One such doctor, Mark Cornachini, details how Dudley – dissatisfied by the discomfort caused by blood-letting and nauseating '*sub-tinctures*' – resolved to create a tasteless powder that would sufficiently, but gently relieve the patient of 'peccant' humours.[66] One might question, then, if the cordial included in the Cavendish manuscript is one recommended by Dudley himself or by one of his admirers. Indeed, given Dudley's strained relationship with the English court, it is unlikely that William would have met the man in person, who remained in Italy until his death (though Charles I recognised his legitimacy in 1644 when his second wife, Alice, was

[63] 'Booke', fol. 37r.

[64] 'Booke', fol 37r– v..

[65] Sir Robert Dudley, Thomas Vaughan, ed., *The Italian Biography of Sir Robert Dudley, Knt. Known in Florentine History as* Il Duca Di Nortombria, *under the Diploma of Ferdinand II, Emperor of Germany, Dated March 9, 1620* (Oxford, 1858), p. 32– 3.

[66] Cornachini's account is cited in Vaughan's *The Italian Biography of Sir Robert Dudley*, p. 34– 38 (p. 36).

created Duchess of Dudley).[67] The Portland text describes a similar powder in a receipt intended for Margaret Cavendish 'to Cure a Fluxe or Dissentorye'; the powder was to be boiled in milk – the effect of which would serve as an emetic and diaphoretic.[68]

The sheer volume of prescriptions and letters included in the manuscript has implications for the agency of the doctor-patient relationship therein. The Cavendish family evidently interpreted the physician's word as less than conclusive and instead looked to question, interrogate and substantiate their recommendations. At various points in the Portland manuscript, then, Farr transcribes letters received from at least ten physicians over the space of six years from 1648 to 1654: the list includes Mayerne; a Chelsea-based apothecary, Christopher Rust; M. Boucheret (presumably Matthew Boucherett, an apothecary of Cripplegate, London) with smaller contributions from a Mr Carer, Mr King, Thomas Michalls, Doctor Farrers, Doctor Morleys and Doctor Pregions. This was not, however, unusual for the seventeenth-century patient; it was common for wealthy individuals, in particular, to consult widely for remedies and advice. As Mary Lindemann writes, early modern people practised 'medical promiscuity… [t]hey often, perhaps usually, consulted several practitioners, serially or concurrently'.[69] Added to this, Cavendish's own work reveals a tangible scepticism of the physician's word, a feeling seemingly emboldened by her prideful ambition: doctors, she writes, 'like most learned men think it a discredit to discourse learnedly to ignorant women, and many

[67] Simon Adams, 'Dudley, Sir Robert' (1574 – 1649), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ODNB* <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/8161> [accessed January 2019].

[68] 'Booke', fol. 63r.

[69] Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 241.

learned men speak most commonly to women, as women do to children, nonsense, as thinking they understand not anything' (*PPO,* sig. B4r).

It is interesting, then, that neither the Countess, the Earl, Sir Thomas Aylesbury or Robert Dudley were formally trained physicians. Though Dudley evidently took a keen interest in medicine, his expertise lay in the Italian naval industry.[70] The inclusion of their recipes in the Portland manuscript attests to the relatively subjective nature of diagnosis and treatment in the century, buoyed by an interest in domestic recipe collecting that ran alongside the relatively objective advice of trained medical practitioners. Following consultations with multiple sources, one might have determined one's own disorders and how best to treat them. Cavendish's self-diagnosis, as it appears in her autobiography and her fictional work, is therefore not unusual: the presentation of the ailed self throughout her oeuvre is an extension of a contemporary habit for cyclical introspection and definition. Indeed, the fluid nature of diagnoses informs her appropriation and ultimate reinvention of the melancholic in the figure of a noblewoman.

iii. Purges and Powders: The Case of Cavendish's Melancholy

What is known of the diagnosis that the family, and specifically Margaret, received? Of all the physicians that the family consulted (and of all the letters

[70] 'Sir Robert Dudley', *ODNB.*

transcribed in the Portland text), the most extensive explanation of her medical condition is provided by the correspondence of Sir Théodore de Mayerne. Born in Geneva in 1573 and trained in Montpellier, Mayerne was physician to Henri IV of France before moving to England to treat James I, who knighted him in 1624.[71] Mayerne then continued as premier physician under Charles I, reportedly as a favourite of Henrietta Maria.[72] He was thus the most famous, and the most influential, of all the physicians that the family consulted, directing the treatment of Margaret, Newcastle and his son from his first marriage, Henry.

It is probable that Mayerne met Newcastle during his time at court in England, but precisely how much direct contact he had with Margaret Cavendish is uncertain. In her biography on 'Mad Madge', Whitaker suggests that, before her marriage in 1645, Cavendish had exchanged letters with Mayerne about her melancholy, a condition in which he specialised. However, Whitaker's source for this information is the Portland papers, specifically a 1648 letter, in which Mayerne implies – albeit implicitly – some previous contact with the couple, and not necessarily with Cavendish alone. One should therefore be hesitant to suggest that there is, or was, any correspondence between Margaret and the physician. Rather, as the Portland manuscript suggests, from 1648 with Mayerne residing in London throughout the civil war and the Cavendish family on the continent, Newcastle regularly wrote to him about the family's melancholy,

[71] Hugh Redwald Trevor-Roper, *Europe's Physician: The Life of Sir Théodore de Mayerne, Europe's Physician* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 14 and p. 25; Brian Nance, *Turquet de Mayerne as Baroque Physician: The Art of Medical Portraiture* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), p. 1.
[72] Brian Nance, *Turquet de Mayerne*, p. 15.

childlessness and haemorrhoids, amongst other ailments.[73] Indeed, the letter to which Whitaker refers, dated 24th May 1648, addresses Newcastle specifically and intimates a prior consultation from which his condition has little improved:

> I see that you are the same in respect of your Health you were at first when I had honour to know you, namely, Melancholyk Hypochondriack, troubled with vapours, which your stomack, the obstructions of the Meseraick vessels, and espetially your Spleene, send continually to the brayne…[74]

Here, Newcastle does not suffer from melancholy, but melancholy hypochondria. The distinction between the two conditions has long been contested. The latter was identified in Galenic medicine as a subspecies of melancholy, its symptoms focusing in the organs below the diaphragm: the Greek 'hypochondrion' refers to the area below the ribs and above the navel, containing the liver and, most notably, the spleen.[75] Melancholy of the hypochondriacal variety was typified by breathlessness, flatulence, pains in the gut and impaired digestion, the bothersome 'vapours' of which were thought to give rise to melancholic thoughts. One well-known sufferer was Queen Elizabeth of Bohemia, daughter of James I; in his 1633 treatise, *De melancholia hypochondriaca,* physician John Hawkins diagnosed her with the condition given her

[73] Harold John Cook, *The Decline of the Old Medical Regime in Stuart London* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 95.

[74] 'Booke', fol. 14r.

[75] Matthew Bell, *Melancholia*, p. 59.

symptoms: 'twitching of the stomach, rumbling of the guts, palpitation of the heart, attacks of trembling and swooning, sleeplessness and loss of weight'.[76]

Throughout the early modern period, scholars and physicians alike would continue to debate the differences, or lack of, between the two conditions: melancholy and hypochondria were variously distinguished by their connection to gender (men and women, respectively) and to madness – the former broadly viewed as a mental condition, the latter, a physical one. The sixteenth-century French physician, Andre du Laurens, had separated hypochondria from melancholy as a manifestly female condition likened to hysteria:

> [A] hysterical hypochondria, that comes from the womb through the retention of menstruation or other matter: it produces the same effects as the others, and is very often more furious as a result of the marvellous sympathy that the womb has with all the other parts of the body.[77]

Du Laurens' definition was not upheld by many others (including Mayerne it would appear, who makes very little reference to the womb, only briefly alluding to it when discussing the couple's childlessness). Instead, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the struggle to delineate the condition(s) continued. By 1729,

[76] Edwin R Wallace and John Gach, eds., *History of Psychiatry and Medical Psychology* (New York: Springer, 2008), p. 492.

[77] Quoted in Bernadette Höfer, *Psychosomatic Disorders in Seventeenth Century French Literature* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 38.

physician Nicholas Robinson, who published his own tract on the spleen, returned to the Galenic notion that they were one and the same disease, writing 'I cannot discover any difference between the spleen and hypochondriacal melancholy, than that the Hip is the spleen improv'd'.[78] However, coterminous to this, the term 'hypochondry' had assumed an altogether different meaning, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests, 'often considered to be a neurosis, characterised by the persistent and unwarranted belief or fear that one has a serious illness' accompanied by 'over-interpretation of physiological changes or minor symptoms'.[79] The *OED* continues, noting that its 'classification as a mental illness was not fully accepted until the 20th century'.[80] Matthew Bell concurs that the definition most likely developed from a gradual accretion of sources across many centuries; thus, its etymological conversion from gastric complaint to imagined illness was not wholesale. In fact, Burton's *Anatomy*, published over a century earlier than the date given in the *OED,* had already implied that the '*ambiguous*' symptoms of '*Hypocondriacall or flatuous melancholy'* are so indistinct '*that the most exquisite Physitians cannot determine of the part affected'*.[81]

Mayerne's use of the precarious term, 'Hypochondriack', might therefore complicate an elucidation of the family's health in light of its homonymous history. Despite its various connotations, his diagnosis most likely recalls the Galenic

[78] Nicholas Robinson, *A New System of the Spleen, Vapours and Hypochondriack Melancholy* (London, 1729), p. 196.

[79] hypochondria, *n.*, *Oxford English Dictionary*, *OED,* <www.oed.com/view/Entry/90458> [accessed January 2019].

[80] Ibid.

[81] Burton, *Anatomy,* 1. 3. 2. 2, p. 256.

terminology associated with the spleen and the digestive region as his advice to Newcastle rests on the purging of the stomach, 'that first region, in which is the roote of all Diseases'.[82] Similarly, the nature of Newcastle's illness, as far as it can be determined through the receipts and letters in the text, seems isolated to the 'hypochondrion' region: one particular letter, apparently in the hand of Newcastle himself, details a painful 'Collicke in [his] Stomack'.[83] He appears to be an epitomic Galenic hypochondriac, experiencing a 'bitious cholicke' so intense as to cause 'contractions of [the] armes, or a palsie in the lower parts of the body'.[84] His account continues, detailing that 'some times the deseas is soe stubborne that it requireth a phisick of more strength to bring forth a green humour: which is like verdegrice and is the cause of the intolerable paines ordinary in this kinde of cholick'.[85] The exact reason for this peculiar vomit is not explained in the letters, though Richard Brookes, in *An Introduction to Physic and Surgery* (1754), would later confirm the association of such 'green Stuff' with hysteric and hypochondriacal fits.[86]

The Portland manuscript is, then, relatively unequivocal in its explanation of Newcastle's illness, but the nature of Margaret Cavendish's condition is all the more difficult to determine. While both Newcastle and his son Henry, who was treated for 'huge malignant vapours rising from the low region of the stomack', were diagnosed

[82] 'Booke', fol. 19v.

[83] 'Booke', fol. 107v.

[84] 'Booke', fol. 108v.

[85] 'Booke', fol. 110r.

[86] Richard Brookes, *An Introduction to Physic and Surgery* (London, 1754), p. 98.

conventionally, only Cavendish is cautioned for acting in ways that Mayerne believed to perpetuate her ill health.[87] His 1648 letter to her husband continues,

> This is all I can say for you for your self […] for my Lady she doth farre exceed you for the matter of the Hypochondry, I have had hir on cure of that disease heretofore with good successe.[88]

Mayerne now chooses to apportion the factors of Newcastle's illness. The specificity of his earlier diagnosis is lacking; Cavendish experiences 'Hypochondry', but melancholy is not mentioned. Of course, given his Galenic approach to William's diagnosis, Mayerne most likely intends to suggest that Cavendish's experience of melancholy is manifested in a particularly severe disruption of the hypochondrion region. However, one cannot dismiss the loaded terminology and its increasingly persuasive links to paranoia and imagined sickness. Indeed, melancholy might feature as an underlying, but consistent feature of Cavendish's selfhood, even before her ambitious debut publication (in a 1645 letter, she asked William to 'supos me now in a veuy mallancholy humer'), but it is, it would seem, largely a self-diagnosis. Mayerne's letters in the Portland text are the only secondary account of the then-marchioness' health to broach the condition. In fact, the only medical issue that Mayerne mentions explicitly are her haemorrhoids. Without the transcription of all of William's outgoing letters, then, one must work backwards from Mayerne's suggested remedies in order to determine which of Cavendish's ailments he sought to treat. Indeed, his prescriptions for her are consistent with the rest of the

[87] 'Booke', fol. 20v.

[88] 'Booke', fol. 19r.

casebook, namely, a thorough course of purges to 'Purge her Cleane […] touching the evacuation of vomits, which she Prefers before those of the Belly'.[89] In one letter, Mayerne explains that she must purge 'that cruell black humour which harms the body and dyes the excrement' – undoubtedly the atrabilious humour of melancholy.[90] In accordance with such a diagnosis, Mayerne then recommends that Cavendish evacuate her body by means of 'sena, rhubarb, agarick, syrope of roses, and the like'.[91]

Most significantly, at various points throughout the receipt book, Mayerne seems careful not to speak too brazenly to the then-Lord Marquis about his Lady. More than just her physical condition, Mayerne conveys his concerns for Cavendish's habitual and compulsive behaviour, warning Newcastle that,

> I believe that to Cure my lady Marquesse your wife will be yet harder; Not so much for the nature of the disease, which as Rebellious, as for the disposition of the Patient, who will not willingly submit to the counsel of her physicians, be they never so good and so skilllfull.[92]

Mayerne insists that 'her Ladiship hath beene Purged and let bloud very much, and without doubt to much'; Cavendish, much to his dismay, appears to have done so herself by her own direction, 'as often at least as by the advice of her Physicians'.[93] Mayerne's

[89] 'Booke', fols. 19r–v.
[90] 'Booke', fol. 25v.
[91] 'Booke', fol. 26r.
[92] 'Booke', fol. 25r.
[93] Ibid.

concern is confounded if one considers the programme of purging recorded in the early pages of the manuscript, which details an extensive 10-day programme of emetics and laxatives along with an equally rigorous call to bleed 'in the right arme of a Basicke vaine to the quantity of nine ounces'.[94] If one imagines Cavendish performing such steps twice as often as she was advised, the consequences for her health would be understandably worrying and potentially dangerous. Thus, whether he intended the alternative meaning of 'Hypochondry' or not, Mayerne's presentation of the marchioness' character ironically conforms to that of the neurotic hypochondriac; his letter intimates that, despite prescribing the usual evacuations, her condition was perpetuated by her imagined belief in the persistence of her symptoms. A 1651 letter confirms this: in it, Mr Rust, Mayerne's apprentice in London, notes that the family will not receive their order of crocus metallorum, a brown-yellow metal compound with emetic qualities, because the quantities ordered 'are so great'.[95] While the apothecary would typically dispense '3 grames at the most' per paper, the family had ordered a staggering '30 grames'.[96] Rust's letter illustrates the seemingly relentless, self-perpetuating cycle of symptom and cure that Mayerne observed in Cavendish's behaviour.

Crocus metallorum is one of the many medicines recommended by Mayerne in the family's receipt book; the manuscript details an extensive programme of remedies from the royal physician alone with his signature compounding of Galenic and Paracelsian influences. Throughout his letters, Mayerne's references to the humours, the

94 'Booke', fol. 4r.

95 'Booke', fol. 98r.

96 Ibid.

spleen, the animal spirits, purging and bloodletting – all of which are foundational tenets of humoral theory propounded by theorists like Burton – appear alongside substances and practices at the heart of Paracelsian medicine. Paracelsus, born Theophrastus von Hohenheim (1493 – 1541), was a Swiss-born physician, alchemist and astrologer whose controversial approach to medicine, particularly toxicology, garnered a cult following throughout the early modern period. Mayerne appears to have dabbled in Paracelsian ideas, telling Newcastle of the benefits of 'laudanum', an alcoholic tincture of Opium supposedly developed by Paracelsus, which as the 'best' of opiate medicines, can 'doe very well stupefying things to provoke sleepe'.[97] His prescriptions also frequently recommend the drinking of 'waters' from the spas of Epsom and 'Bouque' (likely Bouqueval in northern France), the mineral benefits of which Paracelsus had documented in his travels throughout Europe.[98] Indeed, spa waters were of particular interest to Mayerne, who partnered with recusant physician, Thomas Cademan (1590 – 1651) to publish *The Distiller of London* in 1639. The text was a handbook for distillers and physicians alike, lauding the recipes for and benefits of medicinal waters infused with various herbs and spices like lavender and anise.[99] The Cavendish's receipt book includes its own recommendation from Cademan, who perhaps unsurprisingly recommends the drinking of fountain water, 'Baulme' waters (presumably from the Baulme-la-Roche region in eastern France) and water infused with 'Cardus Benedictus' or holy thistle flowers.[100]

[97] 'Booke', fol. 110v.

[98] 'Booke', fol. 20r.

[99] Elizabeth Lane Furdell, *The Royal Doctors, 1485– 1714: Medical Personnel at the Tudor and Stuart Courts* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2001), p. 105.

[100] 'Booke', fols. 7r– v.

Using his letters in the Portland manuscript, one can map Mayerne's experimentation with Paracelsian ideas, despite their seemingly unwilling recipients. In a passage from a 1649 letter, Mayerne shares his interest in the medicinal benefits of mercury and gold, specifically of the 'Mercury drawne from Gold, which I myself have made, having Precipitated it alone with the fire'.[101] According to his beliefs in the power of alchemical magic, Paracelsus had propounded the supremacy of three natural 'principles' – mercury, sulphur and salt – which, when mixed in particular ratios, could produce the most potent of poisons and cures.[102] The pinnacle of Paracelsian medicine was, then, the creation of 'Aurum Potabile' or liquid gold. In this celebrated cure-all, each of the three principles were said to be found in their purest and most balanced form, providing a sovereign remedy able to detoxify and rebalance the body.[103] However, Mayerne's quest for such an elixir ultimately comes to nought; he tells William that, 'I have no great confidence in gold for human bodies, But when it is in the Pursse'.[104] One might, then, imagine that the two men had previously conversed about Paracelsian or alchemical science. In her *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy* (1666), Cavendish confirms that Newcastle owned alchemical apparatus ('as many sorts of Optick Glasses as any one else'), but there is little evidence to suggest his continued practice of the science; he rather employs 'most part of [his] time in the more noble and heroic Art of *Horsemanship* and *Weapons*', she writes (*OUEP,* sig. B1r). In fact, Cavendish herself –

[101] 'Booke', fol. 21r.

[102] Charles Webster, *Paracelsus: Medicine, Magic and Mission at the End of Time* (London: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 138.

[103] L.W. B. Brockliss, *The Medical World of Early Modern France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 127.

[104] 'Booke', fol. 21r.

who referred to alchemy as 'Chymistry' – scorns the alchemists' perversion of Nature and her resources:

> The greatest Chymists are of a strong Opinion, that they can enforce Nature, as to make her go out of her Natural Pace, and to do that by Art in a Furnace, as the Elixar, in half a Year, that Nature cannot in a hundred or a thousand Years. (*TWO*,1655, 176)

Her distrust of alchemical science, particularly in its production of a cure or 'Elixar', may explain Cavendish's presentation in Mayerne's letters – suspicious of his methods, she is deemed a recalcitrant patient. Her reason for disapproval chimes with her thoughts across her oeuvre, in which the natural is prized above the artificial or contrived. However, given that this extract appears in a text published roughly a decade after Mayerne's consultations, it is also possible that her distaste for alchemy developed as a consequence of her experience with physicians who shared in his Paracelsianism; one can imagine that she tried and disapproved of one method too many.

Indeed, Mayerne's choice of remedies, both in the Portland text and elsewhere, span a whole range of categories, some of which were controversial. His borrowings from humoral, astrological, botanical, occultist, alchemical and chemical influences are themselves symptomatic of seventeenth-century medicine, which was similarly eclectic in its approach to illness, reluctant to abandon ancient methods, while encouraging new and progressive thinking. Moreover, that Mayerne's method combines the hermetic philosophy of Paracelsian medicine and the diagnosis and treatment of 'sharpe & Rebell

Humors' is a testimony to both the instability of melancholy itself and the challenge as to how to treat it.[105] In his own text, *Medicinal Counsels and Advices* (published posthumously in 1677), Mayerne recommends a 'balsam of bats' for hypochondriacal patients.[106] Other peculiar ingredients mentioned include hog's grease, stag's marrow and the scrapings from the skull of an unburied man (as part of a treatment for gout). In the Portland manuscript, too, Farr transcribes one receipt in which Newcastle is encouraged to ingest 'the salt of vipers' and to season his meat 'with the powder of frogs dried in the oven […] as if it were nutmegge'.[107] Though the effectiveness of frog against melancholy is not well documented, the creature had a long history as a cure against other ailments: in Galenic medicine, frogs had been used in cures for toothache, toads were a popular remedy for the plague and powdered frog's liver was prescribed to sufferers of epilepsy. Even for eighteenth-century readers of Mayerne's text, such ingredients seemed 'fitter for the witches' cauldron in *Macbeth*, than a learned physician's prescription', but one must be careful not to dismiss them as, what Richard Sugg calls, 'the mere marginal remnants of a mythically backward age'.[108] For all of Cavendish's disapproval, and for their violation of twenty-first century tastes (and ethics), Mayerne's practices were contemporarily relevant and widely appreciated.

Regardless of Mayerne's varied repertoire, the prevailing method of treatment recommended to the family is, at least in the Portland manuscript, evacuation. The

[105] 'Booke', fol. 19v.

[106] Furdell, *The Royal Doctors,* p. 104.

[107] 'Booke', fol. 52v, 22v.

[108] Richard Sugg, *Mummies, Cannibals, and Vampires: The History of Corpse Medicine from the Renaissance to the Victorians* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 253.

receipt book could otherwise serve as a catalogue of purges. They are a consistent feature of both Newcastle and Cavendish's prescriptions and are recommended for Henry Cavendish, too, whose condition is marked for its seriousness. He is treated for 'huge malignant vapours rising from the low region of the stomack', which were thought to cause epileptic episodes. In a letter addressed to his father from a Doctor Davison, Henry's condition is described thus:

> [T]hough I have no particular instruction of the Accidents that have befallen him, yet so far as I can Coniecture by the relation […] all Shakeing that waketh him from his sleepe may be some Epelepticke Convulsions, or something that belongeth to that sicknesse, well often wormes generate in young peoples bodys and nourished to an Extraordinary bignesse may Cause those simptomes and greater; therefore my Counsell is that the Physitians that have him under cure apply him such things that may not onely kill the wormes, but also divert the dangerous consequence that may come after.[109]

To help relieve his body of these 'worms', Henry is prescribed an extreme course of purgatives. Davison's advice was likely informed by Hippocratic medicine which held that, as Galen quoted in his treatise *On the Affected Parts*, 'if weakness [affects] the body, people become epileptics: if it [affects] the mind they become melancholic'.[110] According to Hippocrates, then, both melancholy and epilepsy were caused by an excess of black bile and could be relieved by its removal from the body, typically through vomiting.

[109] 'Booke', fol. 21v.

[110] Quoted in Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy*, p. 64.

Davison's reference to worms, instead of bile, alludes to an increasingly popular belief that parasitic worms in the intestinal tract could cause epileptic fits.

One of many methods of evacuation listed in the receipt book is the use of antimony. Amongst the recipes transcribed in the first half of the manuscript, one stands out for its detail; Farr records a peculiar passage on 'The Virtues of the Antimoniall Cup'.[111] He does not specify that this reference to the cup has any link to Mayerne (in comparison to his Crocus Metallorum recommendation or a 'Salt of Steele' recipe, which is expressly of 'Théodore Mayerne's invention') or any other physician; however, Mayerne had been struck off the register by the Faculty of Medicine of Paris in 1603 for his support of Paracelsian remedies of which antimony was one.[112] By 1638, with Mayerne now in London and treating Charles I, the antimonial cup had been introduced by John Evans' *The Universal Medicine* (1635), whereby the vessel was cast in an antimony– laced tin alloy.[113] Fluids, wine or water, left in the cup for twenty-four hours acquired the properties of the toxin, causing sweating and vomiting once consumed. This apparently 'gentle' method of purging allowed for the removal of unwanted humours and so redressed the imbalance that caused ill health. Thus, though the link to Mayerne is not made explicit, it is arguable that the cup was amongst the methods

111 'Booke', fol. 5v.

112 Trevor– Roper, *Europe's Physician*, p. 82– 3.

113 John Evans, *The Universall Medicine, or, The Vertues of the Antimoniall Cup Collected out of Experiments and Observations of the Most Famous, Learned, and Best Approved Philosophers, and Physicians, that have Written of that Subject* (London, 1634), sig. A3r. At the archbishop of Canterbury's request, the first edition of the text was burnt by the College of Physicians; Lauren Kassell, *Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London: Simon Forman: Astrologer, Alchemist, & Physician* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 178.

preferred by the doctor to administer the purgative – the various powders he prescribes were typically ingested through their dilution in water or wine. The manuscript's inclusion of the passage on the 'virtues' of the cup gives an insight into the thinking behind the use of emetics:

The Virtues of the Antimonial Cup

1. It keepeth the Body from Repletion of humours, the cause of all diseases.
2. It helpeth all the evill effects of the Stomack.
3. It Cureth all Headache comeing from the Stomack.
4. It Cureth all Agues comeing from Repletion.
5. It helpeth the vertigo or swimming of the head.
6. It helpes the Lethargie or forgetfullnesse.
7. It Cureth the greene Sicknesse.
8. It helpeth the falling Sicknesse.
9. It emptieth the Stomack of Viscous flegme; the Liver of choller; the spleene of Melancholly; it cleeres the Brest stopt with flegme – It purgeth the head & throat, It restoreth the Lost Apetite and causeth Rest.
10. Lastly, by takieng it in the Spring & Fall, or any time betwixt;

It preventeth all surfets, agues, goute, Stone– sciaticas, dropsies, Mearells, Poxe, Itch, Scabbs and innumberable evills. [114]

[114] 'Booke', fols. 5v – 6r.

The extract, appearing within the first ten pages of the 'Booke', anticipates the heavy use of purgative therapies prescribed to each member of the Cavendish family, many of which include antimonic compounds (including Crocus Metallorum and the self-styled Duke of Northumberland's own 'Antimonium Tartarizatum'). The letters speak of 'purging potions', 'purging aphorems', 'purging pills', 'stomach pills' and 'digestive powder', all intended to empty the body of their dangerous excess of black bile.[115] One might note, then, that the family's paranoia is evidently not that they should *become* ill, but that they already are and continue to be. Indeed, neither the receipt book nor Cavendish's own writings, which do reference her use of purgatives, refer to any preventative methods, such as talismans or amulets. Paracelsus' *The Archidoxes of Magic* (translated into English and published in London in 1656), for example, propounded the use of metallic talismans, specifically those made of gold, to deter illness seemingly begotten by negative astral influences. According to early modern astrology, Saturn was the attendant of the melancholic, who could be encouraged to attract the counteracting benevolent influence of Jupiter. Cavendish only once refers to the fact that her troubling thoughts spring 'not from Jupiters Head', but her allusions to astrology are not consistent enough throughout her work to suggest her deeply-held belief in its veracity (*PF,* 122).

As the Portland receipt book attests, the Cavendish family were evidently of a time when the use of potentially aggressive medicines to mitigate their melancholy was normalised. Though the family are particular in their requests for and use of vast

[115] 'Booke', fols. 9r– 13v.

quantities of medicine, such methods were typical of those practised by people of their social status. As Brian Nance has shown, melancholy was prevalent amongst Mayerne's elite clientele to the point where the doctor 'sometimes acted as if he tired of diagnosing the condition'. Some of his case notes lack detail, noting that patients merely suffered the 'ordinary symptoms' of the malady or the shorthand, 'melancholy symptoms one and all'.[116] Erin Sullivan's monograph, *Beyond Melancholy: Sadness and Selfhood in Renaissance England,* notes that melancholy makes up 17 per cent of diagnoses in Mayerne's practices.[117] Both Mayerne and Newcastle offer possible causes of the Cavendishes' ailments throughout the Portland papers, all of which are acquired through a particular manner of living rather than carried innately. Both physician and patient identify a leading cause to be nutrition or lack of: the former suggests that colic is due 'more or lesse Accordinge to the fault you Commit in your Diett'.[118] In a later letter, Newcastle concurs, 'this is the fruite of an evill and irrigulare diet *alone*' (emphasis mine).[119] Indeed, contemporary thinking held that, through digestion, food was converted into different humours; bad food resulted in bad humours that would ultimately need to be expelled before they reached harmful levels. In Burton's *Anatomy*, meat, particularly beef, pork, venison and hare, 'begets bad blood', or black bile.[120] Fish, cheese, fruit (apart from apples, which are 'good against melancholy'), garlic, onions and salt are all discouraged.[121] Wine, too, was limited; throughout the letters, Mayerne

116 Nance, *Turquet de Mayerne,* p. 136.
117 Sullivan, *Beyond Melancholy,* p. 98.
118 'Booke', fol. 14r.
119 'Booke', fol. 109r.
120 Burton, *Anatomy,* 1. 2. 2. 1, p. 88.
121 Burton, *Anatomy,* 1. 2. 2. 1, p. 92.

endeavours to limit Margaret's fluid intake to water, apart from the milks and cordials he prescribes.

As members of the upper class, the Cavendish family, like the majority of Mayerne's clients, would have had access to the foods that threatened to worsen their health; indeed, their consumption of such items was, in turn, proof of their affluence. In a 1649 letter, Newcastle insists that his wife be allowed wine as water was simply a 'diueretick under the pretence of cleaning, for feare of a diebetick passion; since it seemeth that my lady drinketh much and maketh much water'.[122] He rather suggests a spice-infused cordial of 'china roots and true lignum nefreticum' to 'cleanse, to coole and comfort the liver and kidneys'.[123] This is typical of the exchanges in the Portland manuscript where the authority and agency of the conventional doctor/patient dialogue is skewed to the point in which Newcastle dismisses recommendations, debates ideas and offers his own alternatives. For example, though Mayerne urges the Cavendishes not to smoke tobacco, a 'stinking commodity, which doth spoile the braine and stupifie it', Newcastle insists that it is the 'most effectual' palliative, 'by my owne experience'.[124] He is, at all times, keen to demonstrate his knowledge of his condition: he suggests that physicians are wrong to presume that his colic, or 'these windes', are caused by a cold humour and goes on to offer Mayerne a new curative recipe – 'I hope the effect and operation of this medicine shall satisfie you', he writes.[125] Like Cavendish, Newcastle's

[122] 'Booke', fol. 115r.

[123] Ibid.

[124] 'Booke', fol. 112r.

[125] 'Booke', fol. 109v.

seeming preoccupation with his health seems to prevent his satisfaction with having only one relatively simple remedy to his malaise.

Newcastle's eagerness to demonstrate his knowledge, knowledge not unfounded in contemporary medical belief, gives an impression of the conversations that would have taken place in the Cavendish household. Presumably, being diagnosed as melancholic hypochondriacs, William and Margaret would have discussed their symptoms with each other and shared ideas as to how to cure them; indeed, Cavendish had to share her experience with her husband so that he could relay it to Mayerne amongst other physicians they consulted. Though only Newcastle's perspective is discernible in the manuscript, one can look to Cavendish's fictional works for some clue as to her understanding of seventeenth-century medicine. In her play, *Loves Adventures* (1662), Cavendish satirises and reworks Mayerne's suggestion that she only consume spa water. Lady Wagtail advises Lady Ignorance:

> If you are troubled with melancholly vapours, arising from crude humours, you must take as soon as you wake after your first sleep, a draught of Wormwood–wine, then lye to sleep again, and then half an hour before you rise, drink a draught of Jelly-broth, and after you have been up an hour and half, eate a White-wine– caudle, then a little before a dinner, take a Toste and Sack, and at your meals, two or three good glasses of Claret (*P,* 23)

By following this schedule, one that brazenly flouts Mayerne's ban on wine, Lady Wagtail suggests that Lady Ignorance's spirits will be revived and will then allow her to

'discourse wittily, and makes one such good company, as invites acquaintance' (*P,* 23). Lady Wagtail's suggested remedy is not surprising if one considers her depiction (intimated by her name) as an inconstant woman or a harlot. Here, Cavendish parodies the banding together of lust and drunkenness. According to humoral theory, wine, thought to be a choleric drink, was inclined to generate heat in the body and engender feelings of desire. Burton himself eschewed the drink: 'I am *aquæ potor* [a water drinker], drink no wine at all, which so much improves our modern wits, a loose, plain, rude writer […] and as free, as loose […], I call a spade a spade'.[126] If, as Burton insists, water is equated with transparency, clarity, rationality in style and method, then wine, as its supposed opposite, might be linked to superfluity, duplicity and irrationality, just as lust was considered an irrational impulse. The literary critic, John Dennis (1658 – 1734), would later blame the 'numerous melancholly Crowd of deep hysterical symptoms' on the excessive consumption of wine and liquor, particularly in women.[127]

Lady Wagtail's satirical interlude is just one of many instances in which Cavendish demonstrates her understanding of humoral theory. In her autobiography, 'A True Relation' (1656), having explained her inclination to melancholy rather than mirth, Cavendish proceeds to list the idiosyncrasies of her condition: she is, she writes, of 'too dull a nature to make one in a merry society', likewise,

[126] Quoted in Burton, *Anatomy* (1651), 'Democritus to the Reader', p. 12.

[127] John Dennis, *An Essay Upon the Publick Spirit; Being a Satyr in Prose Upon the Manners and Luxury of the Times* (London, 1711), p. 13.

> [feasting] would neither agree with my humour or constitution, for my diet is for the most part sparing, as a little boiled chicken, or the like, my drink most commonly water, for though I have an indifferent good appetite, yet I do often fast, out of an opinion that if I should eat much, and exercise little, which I do, only walking a slow pace in my chamber, whilst my thoughts run apace in my brain, so that the motions of my mind hinders the active exercises of my body (*NP,* 385)

Here, Cavendish presents a carefully curated lifestyle designed not to excite her melancholic humours. Like Burton, she implies a connection between these plainer foods and psychological temperance. Just as water, rather than wine, improves Burton's wits, encouraging a 'loose, plain, rude' style without glib ostentation, Cavendish's diet aims to keep her thoughts from running riot.

Likewise, too, Cavendish must limit her physical exercise, 'only walking a slow pace in [her] chamber'; 'for should I dance or run, or walk apace', she writes, 'I should dance my thoughts out of measure, run my fancies out of breath, and tread out the feet of my numbers' (*NP*, 385). As her materialist monism would have it, then, physical movement of the body encouraged – if not, reflected – the movement of thoughts in the mind. There is sufficient evidence of Cavendish's decided lack of movement in the Portland papers; in a letter to Mayerne written sometime after 1654, and before the publication of her first book, Cavendish's husband notes that 'her ladiships occupation in

writing of books with a sedentary life is absolutely bad for health'.[128] This scenario was not unknown to Mayerne: the sedentary habits of his affluent patients allowed for excess black bile to build up in the digestive organs, leading to abdominal pains and excess wind – the typical signs of hypochondria – as well as unusual passions of the mind. Another leading cause of melancholy was, therefore, idleness, 'the chiefe author of all mischiefe'.[129] Burton's *Anatomy* records that 'there is no greater cause of melancholy than idleness, no better cure than business'. Indeed, the words 'idle' or 'idleness' appear thirty times in the *Anatomy's* preface alone, reflecting the author's belief in its pervasiveness – it 'is the malus genius of our nation', he writes.[130] Burton relates idleness to the deadly sin of sloth and the medieval state of acedia. In the wake of Hippocrates and Florentine physician-cum-scholar, Marsilio Ficino (1433 – 1499), too, describes the physical and psychological festering that comes with 'wit without employment'.[131]

Though Mayerne's reply to Newcastle's letter bemoaning his wife's indolence does not survive, the manuscript contains multiple suggestions that the couple exercise moderately, particularly after an invasive course of purging: 'you must rest for an hour after the taking of it [a 'Steele liquor'], and then exercise yourself moderately the space of two hours after'.[132] However, rather than confront her physical idleness with physical exercise, as Mayerne prescribes, Cavendish seeks to treat physical inertia with the

[128] 'Booke', fol. 115r.

[129] Burton, *Anatomy,* 1. 2. 2. 6, p. 112.

[130] Burton, *Anatomy,* 'Democritus to the Reader', p. 53.

[131] Burton, *Anatomy* (1651)*,* 1. 2. 2. 6, p. 86.

[132] 'Booke', fol. 5r.

psychological 'business' of writing. It would appear, when reading the Portland manuscript in conjunction with her own account of her condition (both in her own memoir and what might be gleaned from her otherwise fictional work), that Cavendish developed her very own idea of what her illness entailed. Newcastle's account of her ready adoption of a sedentary disposition is not the only instance of Cavendish's reluctance to follow her physician's, or indeed, her husband's, advice. In his letters to Newcastle, one can sense Mayerne's cautious, if firm, tone when he warns her husband that she should limit blood-letting, if not stop it altogether, 'because I believe she hath her selfe done enough already'.[133] He continues, implying their meeting in person sometime in 1653 when she returned to London from the continent: 'last time that I speake to my lady about her health, she did heare patiently resolve to do: but that resolution did quickly pass and she did nothing: and perhaps will doe soe now'.[134] Perhaps the main reason for such obstinance is that Cavendish interpreted her condition differently from that which the then seventy-nine year old Mayerne described and sought to treat. However, an elucidation of the extent of Cavendish's condition is precluded by her tendency for self-diagnosis, neuroticism and performance. In this way, her interpretation of her illness is as susceptible to dramatisation as any other aspect of her character. Just like her 'antic' dress, Cavendish's presentation of her melancholy is choreographed in such a way as to tantalise and provoke its audience.

One can therefore only speculate as to the reality of her melancholy: the multitude of purgatives recommended for both Cavendish and Newcastle would confirm

[133] 'Booke', fol. 27v.

[134] 'Booke', fol. 115r.

some form of melancholic imbalance, but the repercussions of the illness and its equally deleterious treatments on Cavendish's body and, more importantly, on her mind are uncertain. The effect of the condition on her mind, a subject that drives much of her fictional writing, is uncorroborated. Indeed, Cavendish would have her readers believe that her melancholy was innate and not acquired through idleness or diet, as Mayerne suggested. The division between innate and acquired melancholy can be loosely mapped onto Burton's segregation of causes into 'natural' and 'non-natural' kinds, a hypothesis first posited by the eleventh-century polymath, Avicenna.[135] Marsilio Ficino and Robert Burton, both of whom wrote celebrated texts on the condition, were self-assumed 'innate' melancholics, born under either Saturn or Mercury (and their principal houses of Capricorn and Aquarius, or Virgo and Pisces, respectively).[136] In his *Liber de Vita* ('The Book of Life', 1489), Ficino claimed that the former 'invites us to begin our studies', while the latter 'works them out and has us stick to them and make discoveries'.[137] The 'children' of these planets were thus inherently inclined to contemplation and invention. Theirs was an intrinsic, deep-rooted condition to which Cavendish aspired and laid claim throughout her oeuvre, detailing a childhood tendency to the same pensive thought and study. Hers was not a 'crabbed' or peevish disorder, but a 'soft, melting, solitary, and contemplating melancholy' (*NP,* 384).

[135] Angus Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy: Robert Burton in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 63.

[136] Charles Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft: Print and Visual Culture in Sixteenth Century Europe* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 217; also, Klibansky, *Saturn and Melancholy,* p. 204– 5.

[137] Marsilio Ficino, *The Book of Life,* trans. by Charles Boer (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1980), p. 6.

Unfortunately, Cavendish's exact birth date is unknown – it is generally agreed to be sometime in 1623, though some early accounts insist on 1624 – and, as such, one cannot verify her saturnine geniture. However, it would have suited her to believe, or have her readers believe, that this was so. Ficino insists that only a naturally occurring excess of black bile can lead 'to judgment and wisdom'.[138] That Cavendish could prove herself to be a natural melancholic would have undoubtedly bolstered her pursuit for literary fame with a certain sagacious, if untutored, authenticity. The Portland manuscript both informs and undermines her endeavour to be considered in the league of Ficino and Burton; Mayerne confirms her experience of melancholy, but only to the extent that it is a physical disease, focusing mainly in the digestive region. There is no evidence of any psychological disturbance resulting from her ill health. In her fictional texts, however, Cavendish rarely speaks of somatic complaints, particularly those clearly related to hypochondria, but instead amplifies her symptoms to powerful psychological torments. One might imagine that Cavendish was concerned to avoid the base association of female melancholy, which limited her experience to the body; rather, in her work, hers is a melancholy of an altogether different tradition. Its sufferers, typically men of gentry, were seldom noted in the physician's casebooks of the day – these men were not the patient-subjects of texts, but the writers of them. The next chapter will therefore discuss the questions precipitated not only by the material in the receipt book, but by its very existence: what was its purpose and what role, if any, did Cavendish have to play in its creation? Ultimately, then, one might compare the presentation of her condition in the manuscript to that in her own work in order to determine to what

[138] Quoted in Stephanie Shirilian, *Robert Burton and the Transformative Powers of Melancholy* (London: Routledge: 2016), p. 104.

extent she sought to elevate her experience of melancholy in an expedient strategy for literary recognition.

Chapter Five

Thunder and Rainbows: Cavendish's False 'Psychology'

i. Headaches and 'Giddynesse': Diagnosing Mental Trouble

As has been discussed, the alternative tradition of melancholy – apart from the bodily complaints of the atrabilious gut – carried a desirable heritage that undoubtedly had great appeal to an ambitious 'creatoress' like Cavendish. Throughout her work, she lobbies for membership of this exclusive group by 'ennobling' her symptoms, lending a greater dignity to her melancholy by choosing to interpret and communicate her experience of a mental, rather than solely corporeal, condition. Returning to the letters between Mayerne and Newcastle, this chapter will demonstrate how Cavendish appeared to interpret her physician's advice with a good measure of poetic licence. The comparison of these letters and Cavendish's own work reveal a telling transmutation of her symptoms from the physical to the psychological. The false psychology, or psychopathy, created as a result proves essential to the fulfilment of her writing manifesto and its coterminous promise of literary fame.

One might wonder, given the discursive distance between Mayerne's prescription and Cavendish's self-diagnosis, what role Cavendish had to play in the creation of the Portland manuscript. The history of receipt books documented by Hunter and others would suggest that she, as the woman of the household, had asked Farr to transcribe the

letters received by her husband as well as various recipes for digestive powders and tonics. However, the Portland papers are largely medicinal in focus (except for an entry detailing a lady's 'way to Stew a Carpe' and a short note on how to fatten chickens, both with little curative potential), which distinguishes the manuscript from texts of this type with their typical emphasis on domestic recipes.[1] This would consequently complicate the idea of Cavendish's involvement in the receipt book, or at least her lead role in its creation. The Portland text's most intriguing prescription in this regard is 'a receipt for Sir Walter Ralegh for stomach pills'.[2] No date is given for the entry, but that the previous letter is dated 1654, one can assume it was gathered around this time, by which Ralegh had been dead for almost forty years. Why, then, was Farr asked to include this entry? The most likely reason is at Newcastle's request: an admirer of the poet explorer, Newcastle describes Ralegh in a letter to Charles II as one of the few men 'borne to Leade, & nott to followe, To teach, & not to Learne'.[3]

Though it was not uncommon for receipt books to include prescriptions relating to other people (whether it be other members of the family in question, friends or well-known public figures), Ralegh is regardless an interesting choice for the Cavendishes given his polarised reputation amongst Royalists and Parliamentarians. The Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts accounts for a number of documents in which Ralegh's receipts were included; though most are dated to the 1620s in the years immediately

1 'Booke', fol. 97r, 196r.

2 'Booke', fol. 98v.

3 William Cavendish, 'A Letter of Advice to Charles II on the Eve of the Restoration', in Thomas P. Slaughter, ed., *Ideology and Politics on the Eve of the Restoration: Newcastle's Advice to Charles II* (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 72.

following his death, there are a number of examples dating to the same period as the Portland text. These include a receipt for 'A Excellent Cordiall ielly a Comforter of the harte and helpe to digesture of Sir water raleigh' (dated to the mid 17th century) and a copy of 'Sir Walter Rawleighs great Cordiall' in the papers of Dr John Downes (dated March 1659).[4] Ralegh's elaborate cordial, a cure-all made from ambergris, pearl, musk, unicorn mineral and coral amongst other flowers, herbs and spices, proved a popular addition to receipt books of the day, reappearing seven times in the catalogue between 1619 and 1694.[5] While the Portland text is not unusual for referencing Ralegh, it is seemingly alone in citing his receipt for stomach pills. Including Ralegh's 'receipt' alongside tracts of his own illness, Newcastle might have looked to compare himself and his family's ailments to those of a distinguished man, whose stomach pills were presumably to treat his melancholy, the essence of which permeated the gentleman's poetry:

> Farewell, false love, oracle of lies,[…]
> A way of error, a temple full of treason,
> In all effects contrary unto reason.[6]

[4] Sir Walter Ralegh, *Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts 1450– 1700, CELM,* <www.celm– ms–org.uk/introductions/RaleghSirWalter.html> [accessed June 2019], see RaW 722 and 720.5.
[5] The ingredients included in the cordial, and their reasons for inclusion, are detailed in Nicholas Le Fèvre's *A Discourse upon Sir Walter Rawleigh's Great Cordial* (London, 1664), p. 8– 62.
[6] Sir Walter Ralegh, 'Farewell False Love' (1588) in Agnes M. C. Latham, ed., *The Poems of Sir Walter Ralegh* (London: Routledge, 1951), p. 28.

It is telling that, during their exile to the continent, the Cavendish family should have seized upon an opportunity to align themselves with a melancholic man who, once great, also fell from favour. The anomaly not only chimes with the family's preoccupation with their health, but also makes manifest the ambition so prevalent in Cavendish's own work, which was evidently shared by her husband, a published author in his own right. Just as they collaborated in their fictional and dramatic texts (with Newcastle submitting various verses to Cavendish's poems and plays throughout her career), the couple are likely to have worked together on curating an account of their melancholic condition.

The addition of Ralegh's receipt is symptomatic of Cavendish's ennoblement of her illness throughout her oeuvre. Her own receipt for stomach pills sought to appease a disease that commonly afflicted powerful, intelligent and creative men, particularly poets, of whom Ralegh was a prime example. Such was the question posed by the author of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata*:

> Why is it that all men who have become outstanding in philosophy, statesmanship, poetry or the arts are melancholic, and some to such an extent that they are infected by the diseases arising from black bile […]?[7]

As Juliana Schiesari explains, more than just the undesirable physical disease, throughout the Renaissance and beyond, melancholy had come to be perceived as 'an eloquent form of mental disturbance – a special, albeit difficult, gift – as hierarchically

[7] Aristotle, *Problemata,* XXX, 1, reproduced in Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy,* p. 57.

superior to mere depression as were the individuals affected by it'.[8] Schiesari's use of 'depression' may be anachronistic in this instance (when used in the context of mental illness, the OED cites the first use of 'depression' as 1905), but the idea that only 'superior' people experienced this 'special' form of melancholy is significant and one that Cavendish looked to appropriate for her own.

In the Portland text, then, Ralegh's 'receipt' acts as a metonym of the man himself; no other information is required but a suggestion of his health, which, in its self, speaks of his noble character. However, the idea that melancholy should be linked to the mind, as well as the stomach, was in its infancy during Cavendish's lifetime. There was a firm belief that the condition affected the mental faculties (Mayerne records how hypochondriacal vapours are sent 'continually to the brayne'), but little evidence as to *how*. This would explain Cavendish's frequent attempts to 'similize', or provide analogies for, the workings of the brain in her early work, particularly in her first text, *Poems and Fancies* (1653). By contrast, Mayerne's letters to Cavendish's husband reveal only a limited concern for the psychology for his patients. His understanding of psychosomatic or somatopsychic illness beyond the merely physical is, at best, inconsistent. While he acknowledges the 'huge malignant vapours' which provoke Henry, William's son and the future Viscount Mansfield, he suggests that they cause epileptic fits, which strike the heart and prick the nerves, 'all without touching the Judgement or the Sence'.[9] However, two years earlier, in a 1647 letter, Mayerne had told Newcastle that 'a carelessness in Matters of health is blameable and dangerous, soe too much curiousities which breeds a

[8] Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia,* p. 8.

[9] 'Booke', fol. 20v.

thousand doubts in your mind, is superfluous and full of unquietnesse'. Here, body and mind are entwined and receptive to one another in a conversely dualistic approach, albeit that Mayerne's link between ill health and the mind's 'unquietnesse' seems cautious. At the most, while addressing Cavendish's hypochondriacal habits, Mayerne warns that she must heed the advice of her physicians to limit her purging lest an 'accident' should happen; such remedies can 'trouble the head with vapours, causing in some a light payne, in others a kind of giddynesse', he writes.[10] This is the only overt reference that Mayerne's letters (and, indeed, any letters in the manuscript) make to melancholy's generation of mental 'trouble' and, even then, it implies a visceral pain or faintness *in* the head rather than any form of psychological disturbance.

One might gain a more thorough understanding of Mayerne's approach to the mind/body problem, and its manifestation in melancholy, through his contact with other patients. Around the same time that Mayerne treated Cavendish, he was also asked to find a cure for the 'perverse Headache[s]' of Lady Anne Conway (1631 – 1679), a woman who shared much of Cavendish's intellectual curiosity and vigour if not her desire to publish (her only text, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy,* was published posthumously in 1690).[11] Throughout her life, Conway sought treatment for persistent headaches, likely migraines, to no avail; in a 1653 letter to the philosopher Henry More (1614 – 1687), to whom she was a life-long correspondent and informal

[10] 'Booke', fol. 25v.

[11] Marjorie Nicholson and Sarah Hutton, *The Conway Letters: The Correspondence of Anne, Viscountess Conway, Henry More, and their Friends 1624– 1684* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 163; Line Cottegnies et al., eds., *Women and Curiosity in Early Modern England and France* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), p. 155.

student, she records how she has experienced 'a violent fitt of the headache which troubled me 2 or 3 dayes'.[12] More responds with a likely cause of Conway's pain: after speaking to a 'Dr Ridsley', he writes, it is probable that she 'encrease[s] [her] disease by over much meditation'.[13] He relates that, by his own experience, study and meditation could propagate potentially harmful melancholic vapours: the 'intension of thoughts and anxious consyderations of thinges, will extremely heat a mans spirits, and call them up into the head'.[14] In his letters to Conway, More suggests that her headaches may be brought on by melancholy, which was, in turn, worsened by her saturnine inclination to work, write and think – the very condition Cavendish would have her readers believe that she too suffers with.

It is interesting, then, that both women consult Mayerne and both are treated in the same way using invasive emetics. Though Conway's symptoms are exclusively in the head and supposedly caused by some kind of intellectual fatigue (in contrast to Cavendish's comparatively visceral ailments, including haemorrhoids, amenorrhea and infertility), Mayerne prescribes the same medicines designed to clear the gut or lower regions of the body of melancholic humour. In Conway's case, these methods were particularly dangerous: Thomas Willis (1621 – 1675), a noted physician specialising in the early study of neurological disorders, notes that her prescription for a 'Mercurial

12 Nicholson and Hutton, *The Conway Letters,* p. 129.

13 Nicholson and Hutton, *The Conway Letters*, p. 76.

14 Ibid.

Oyntment, by the counsell of Sir Théodore Mayern [….] terrified [him]'.[15] Indeed, Mayerne is credited, somewhat infamously, with the popularising of calomel, a 'submuriate of mercury'.[16] The heated concoction of mercury, sulphuric acid and salt-water brine – the three foundational elements of Paracelsian medicine – produced a sweet-tasting white powder that would be diluted into drinks and used as a laxative.[17] It is by taking such 'troublesome Salivation[s]' that, Willis writes, Conway 'ran the hazard of her life'.[18] In fact, her repeated ingestion of mercury, later under the consultation of the chemist, Charles Huis, is thought to have contributed not only to the persistence of her condition, but to her death at the age of 47.[19]

As surviving correspondence suggests, Mayerne was in contact with the family in the first year of Anne's marriage to Edward Conway (1623 – 1683), later first Earl of Conway, in 1651. This time frame also spans his treatment of the Cavendishes, an overlap that presents the intriguing, if not alarming, possibility that Cavendish was also prescribed mercury. Indeed, in a 1654 letter, Newcastle describes 'that glistering sand of a white colour: which my lady boileth in her brine', which, once 'ingendered in the stomack' is 'voided by nature' in order to clear the 'many obstructions of the natural

[15] Thomas Willis, *Dr Willis' Practice of Physick Being the Whole Works of That Renowned and Famous Physician Wherein Most of the Diseases Belonging to the Body of Man are Treated Of, with Excellent Methods and Receipts for the Cure of the Same* (London, 1684), p. 119.
[16] Trevor– Roper, *Europe's Physician,* p. 217n; Richard Swiderski, *Calomel in America: Mercurial Panacea, War, Song and Ghosts* (Boca Raton: Brown Walker Press, 2009), p. 21.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Thomas Willis, *Two Discourses Concerning the Soul of Brutes Which is That of the Vital and Sensitive of Man* (London, 1683), p. 122.
[19] Allison Coudert and Taylor Corse, eds., *Anne Conway: The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. x.

conduits'.[20] It is highly likely that this substance was the poisonous agent, calomel, which Cavendish ingested by Mayerne's instruction. The damaging effects of exposure to mercury were only made known in the eighteenth century; in the millinery industry, specifically in felt-hat making where mercury was used as an antibacterial, the connection was made between the chemical agent and the depression, memory loss and even delirium experienced by its users (popularising the alternative name for erethism or mercury poisoning, 'mad hatter's disease' and expressions such as 'mad as a hatter').[21]

Mayerne was evidently unaware of the psychological impact of his treatments on both Conway and Cavendish, and appears to prioritise their evacuations of the gut regardless of their differing symptoms. Similarly, there is no suggestion that Mayerne discouraged either woman from their work in order to ease their mind (as More's conversation with Dr Ridsley recommended). Elsewhere, in his letters to Edward Conway, Mayerne reveals his scepticism as to whether voracious study and writing, in particular, could cause illness: Mayerne refers to writing as 'a powerful disease […] by which especially in Germany, most of the world is afflicted, and what is more *scribimus indocti doctique poemata passim*' (quoting from Horace, 'everywhere, learned and unlearned, we write poems').[22] Citing Horace, Mayerne's use of 'disease' is surely intended sarcastically. Like Burton before him and Walpole after him, Mayerne

[20] 'Booke', fol. 114v.

[21] Jules J. Berman, *Rare Diseases and Orphan Drugs: Keys to Understanding and Treating the Common Diseases* (London: Academic Press, 2014), p. 230.

[22] Nicholson and Hutton, *The Conway Letters,* p. 21.

subscribes to the idea of *cacoethes scribendi*, the itch to write, mocking those who claim to suffer with a compulsion to produce prose or poetry. His flippant assertion that 'most of the world is afflicted' satirises the condition in the vein of its Juvenalian origins. Such indifference would explain his failure to acknowledge the mental ramifications of the disease (and his recommended treatments) in both Conway and Cavendish.

One early modern explanation that went some way towards accounting for melancholy's effect on the mind was that of melancholy 'adust'. Taken from the Latin for 'burnt', 'adust' melancholy denoted the combustion or putrefication of black bile in the gut, the fumes of which could rise to the brain.[23] Indeed, in More's letter to Anne Conway, his consultation with Dr Ridsley presents this form of melancholy as a possible diagnosis: Conway's 'anxious consyderations of thinges' heated her spirits and '[called] them up into the head'. This form of the condition was distinguished from that caused by a naturally occurring excess of black bile (e.g., by birth – that one was born under the astrological guardianship of Saturn). Rather, some thinkers argued that a particularly nefarious form of melancholy could be cultivated through 'unnatural' causes. Burton's *Anatomy* specifies these six 'non-natural' categories as air, diet, sleep and vigil, exercise, retention and evacuation, and the passions of the soul.[24] Poor conduct in any of these areas could foster unwanted heat. The idea was not new to Burton; a century earlier, Thomas Elyot's *The Castel of Health* (1547) refers to 'two sortes' of melancholy, the first

[23] F. David Hoeniger, *Medicine and Shakespeare in the English Renaissance* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), p. 106.

[24] Andrew Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550– 1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 156.

'colde and drye, the other is called adust or bourned'. The latter, in particular, was notable for its ferocity: 'when that humour is hette, it maketh men madde'.[25] Burton's own references stretch back even further to the ancient Persian polymath, Avicenna: 'if it come from melancholy it selfe adust, those men, saith *Avicenna, are usually sad and solitary* […] *more fearefull, and have long, sore, and most corrupt imaginations*'.[26] Here, the potential for melancholy adust to affect the mind – and more specifically, the imagination – is made known. The smoke and vapours produced during the burning process would rise to the brain, Burton continues,

> *[A]s blacke and thick cloud couers the Sun, and intercepts his beames and light, so doth this melancholy vapour obnubilate the mind, and inforce it to many absurd thoughts and Imaginations.*[27]

According to Burton, then, melancholy adust had the potential to ambush the mind as its rational faculties are forcibly 'obnubilated' (a Latinate term for 'obscuring with cloud') and reduced to senselessness. However, for the would-be poet, Burton's description presents the ideal affliction, granting the imagination's freedom from the magisterial control of reason, judgement and restraint.[28]

[25] Thomas Elyot, *The Castel of Health* (London: 1547), p. 66.

[26] Burton, *Anatomy,* 1. 3. 1. 3, p. 247.

[27] Burton, *Anatomy*, 1. 3. 1. 3, p. 258.

[28] 'obnubliation', *n*. 'The action of darkening or fact of being darkened with or as with a cloud; (*Med.*) obscuring or clouding of the mind or faculties', *OED,* < www.oed.com/view/Entry/129785 > [accessed January 2019].

While Mayerne showed little knowledge or interest in melancholy adust, Cavendish, on the other hand, was certainly aware of the condition that might explain, or rather authorise, a link between her need to create and her supposedly melancholic disposition. She describes the process by which the vapours of burnt bile rose to the brain, albeit with her signature eccentricity; blending contemporary medical discourse with fairy folklore, she writes:

> Thus, besides our own imaginations,
> Fairies in our brain beget inventions […]
> When from the stomach vapours do arise,
> Fly up into the Head (as to the skies)
> And as storms use, their houses down may blow,
> Which, by their fall, the Head may dizzy grow. (*PF,* 162)

One method used to neutralise these heated vapours was the cold-water douche, a form of 'water-cure' or hydrotherapy that became a mainstay of treatments for insanity throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, in the *Anatomy,* the effectiveness of the treatment to assuage melancholy is questionable, it is 'praised by some, discommended by others', Burton writes.[29] He cites the practice of Italian physician, Geronimo Mercuriali (in Latin, Mercurialis), who would have his melancholic patients not only drink water, as Mayerne, too, instructs, but also 'have the water poured on [their] head'.[30] Indeed, the shock in temperature was said to promote the circulation

[29] Burton, *Anatomy*, 2. 2. 2. 2, p. 314.
[30] Burton, *Anatomy*, 2. 2. 2. 2, p. 315..

of the humours, cooling the heated fumes that threatened the adust form of melancholy madness and its psychological trouble. In a letter transcribed in the Portland manuscript discussing Cavendish's condition, Mayerne attempts to divert her attention from the head, explaining to Newcastle that the 'vapours that trouble the head have their original from the lower region which must bee kept cleane' instead.[31] Given this reply, it is likely that Newcastle's outgoing letter – now lost – had registered his wife's concern for melancholy's effect on her mind through the development of adust 'vapours'. Mayerne's letter continues to caution her that 'putting ye head in cold water is dangerous this could season'.[32] Again, he cautions against her impulse for self-diagnosis and self-administered treatments: 'experimentum periculosom [experiment is dangerous] saith Hypocrates'.[33] As Mayerne would have it, then, there was little to no justification for Cavendish's decision to extinguish the adust fumes. It would seem that, in his view, she attempts to treat a disease of the mind, one historically linked to the inventive imagination, while the sickness is, in fact, in her stomach.

It is fitting that in her own work, *Poems and Fancies* (1653), Cavendish uses Burton's analogy of obnubilation for a similar purpose, but rather than describing toxic vapours that 'inforce' the mind to 'absurd thoughts and Imaginations', she is careful to make its outcome a positive one. In a short poem, 'Similizing Thoughts', she writes:

Sad melancholy *Thoughts* are for *Shadowes* plac'd,

[31] 'Booke', fol. 112v..

[32] 'Booke', fol. 112v.

[33] 'Booke', fol. 113r.

By which the lighter *Fancies* are more grac'd.
As through a dark, and watry *Cloud,* more bright,
The Sun breakes forth with his *Resplendent Light.*
Or like to *Night's black Mantle,* where each Star
Doth clearer seem, so lighter *Fancies* are.
Some like to *Rain-bows* various Colours shew,
So round the *Braine Fantastick Fancies* grow. (*PF,* 145– 6)

Here, the 'clouds' of melancholy do not obscure or intercept the sun, but rather make its brightness more apparent. Cavendish extends Burton's metaphor, the '*Resplendent Light*' of the sun represents 'lighter *Fancies*', distinguished from 'Sad melancholy *Thoughts*' cased in 'dark, and watry' clouds. Only when the sun and the rain, the light and the dark, are brought together are there '*Rain-bows*', the 'various Colours' of which represent the brain's most creative thoughts, '*Fantastick Fancies*'. While Burton depicts the obstruction of the mind as a symptom, Cavendish rather sees it as a prerequisite, facilitating her creative ambitions. Reading this poem in tandem with Mayerne's letter, written a year later, one might imagine that, by dipping her head in cold water, Cavendish attempts to accelerate the cooling process by which 'Sad melancholy *Thoughts*' became '*Fantastick Fancies*', or the flames of melancholy adust in the gut became clouds of inspiration in the mind.

ii. Blazes and Darkness: Ennobling Symptoms

Taken from her first publication, this passage on 'Sad melancholy *Thoughts'* sets in motion Cavendish's public utterance of her own brand of melancholy. In it, she accounts for the connection between her creative instinct and melancholic disposition, elevating a condition that, once manifested in a *female* body, was thought to cause only bodily discomfort and perhaps mental torment. Over a decade later, in *Philosophical Letters* (1664), Cavendish explicates her condition again with reference to the likes of clouds and rainbows – her melancholy is less a malady than a privilege. The text itself takes the form of fictional correspondence between two unnamed women; Cavendish includes only one set of letters, not specifying if they are incoming or outgoing. The format might reflect the then-marchioness' preference for the preservation of such correspondence, of which the Portland manuscript is a prime example, and certainly serves as an exhibition of her penchant for presenting the working– out of her profound, if knotty, logic. It is a format that Cavendish experimented with in *Sociable Letters*, too, published in the same year. However, while the content of *Sociable Letters* remains relatively un-attributable – Cavendish avoids any unequivocal claim to the ideas expressed therein (despite signing some letters with her maiden initials) – in *Philosophical Letters,* she introduces the work with a prefatory address detailing her intention to thread the narrative with her own philosophy. Here, the interlocutory nature serves a more explicit purpose, that being to make her own thoughts more 'perspicuous and intelligible by the opposition of other Opinions' (*PL, 2*). Of note in this regard is a letter addressing the work of Flemish chemist (and one of the last bastions of Paracelsianism), Jan Baptist van Helmont (1580 – 1644) and, in particular, his theory of 'blas'.

Van Helmont himself did not produce a full definition of the term in his own work – a matter which no doubt fuelled Cavendish's frustrations – but it has since been described as 'the power of activity peculiar to each thing, impressed on it by the Creator'; it is something of a spiritual force by which the agent might affect 'transitive change' on its chosen object.[34] He therefore suggests that 'a naturall Winde, *is a flowing Air, moved by the Blas of the Stars*', the stars seemingly impelling the wind to action.[35] In her epistolary fiction, Cavendish quotes this same line, suggesting that, 'if this were so, then, in my judgment, when the Stars blaze, we should have constant Winds', and the more they blaze, the more violent the winds (*PL,* 260). Yet, she continues, 'I have rather observed the contrary, that when the Stars blaze most apparently, we have the calmest weather either in Summer or Winter' (*PL,* 260–1). Though these views are raised by Cavendish's fictional surrogate in her epistolary text, they emerge again in her prose-fiction, *The Blazing World* (1666); the concept of blas evidentially vexed Cavendish enough for her to confront it more than once. Having enquired as to the cause of thunder, the Empress is told that it is either 'the encounter of cold and heat' or

> [A] sudden and monstrous blas, stirred up in the air, and did not always require a cloud; but the Empress not knowing what they meant by blas (for even they themselves were not able to explain the sense of this word) liked the former better (*BW,* 25)

[34] H. Stanley Redgrove and I. M. L. Redgrove, *Joannes Baptista Van Helmont: Alchemist, Physician and Philosopher* (London: William Rider & Son, 1922), p. 45.

[35] Jan Baptista Van Helmont, *Workes Containing His Most Excellent Philosophy, Physic, Chirurgery, Anatomy* (London, 1664), p. 81.

Here, the explanation of thunder given alludes to Van Helmont's belief that it was caused by the 'spiritual blas of the evil spirit'.[36] It is an unseen energy, rather than one governed by material forces.

Van Helmont's work – expounding evil spirits, internal heavens and a system of causal dependency – understandably exasperated Cavendish, a secular materialist writer whose own philosophy imbued matter with its own measure of rationality and self-knowledge. In the spirit of Paracelsus, Van Helmont suggested that the human body contained a microcosmic heaven that, as the last creation in Genesis, follows the movements of the macrocosmic heaven created before it: he insists that 'there is in us a Spirit stirring up all things by its Blas; which Spirit, by a Microcosmical Analogy […], he compares to the blasts of the world' (*PL,* 261).[37] For Cavendish's persona in *Philosophical Letters*, however, such a theory of interconnectedness and causation, a pathetic fallacy-like experience, is unsatisfactory. 'I dare say, I could never perceive, by my sense and reason, any such blazing Spirit in me' (*PL,* 261), she writes,

> but I have found by experience, that when my mind and thoughts have been benighted with Melancholy, my Imagination hath been more active and subtil, then when my mind has been clear from dark Melancholy: Also I find that my

[36] John Baptista Van Helmont, *Oriatrike or Physick Refined* (London, 1662), p. 17.
[37] Georgiana D. Hedesan, *An Alchemical Quest for Universal Knowledge: The 'Christian Philosophy' of Jean Baptiste Van Helmont (1579– 1644)* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 82.

> thoughts and conceptions are as active, if not more, in the night then in the day. (*PL,* 261)

Cavendish's persona appears to interpret van Helmont's theory both literally, in terms of light and darkness (the absence of a 'blas' or a 'blaze'), and academically. She credits melancholy with the firing of her creative faculties, which is at its most prevalent and powerful in darkness, without 'blas'. The world that the persona perceives outside of herself does not match, reflect or influence her inner world as Van Helmont believed it ought. Her rejection of the theory both chimes with and perpetuates her self-proclaimed self-sufficiency; her thoughts are created without the help and direction of an outside agent or spirit. Indeed, her persona asserts that 'Light, Blazes, and all those effects are no more then other effects of nature are; nor can they have more power on other Creatures, then other Creatures have on them', and as such her autonomy is assured (*PL,* 261). Like her interpretation of Burton's passage on 'obnubilation', Cavendish's writing adapts the conventionally adverse and dreaded symptoms of melancholy as imaginatively favourable and productive. Thus, the disease is not ominous but enabling. The viscous humour of Galenic medicine is ennobled, promoting the imagination from '*absurd thoughts and Imaginations*' to 'subtil' activity.

The use of 'subtil' here is purposeful and telling, implying both expertise, even ingeniously so, and cunning.[38] One might argue, then, that Cavendish engages with a

[38] 'subtile', *adj*. and *n*. (1.a.) 'Of a person or animal, an action, behaviour […] crafty, cunning, sly, teacherous', in use since 1387 and (2) 'Of a person: skillful, clever, expert', in use since 1393, *Oxford English Dictionary*, *OED* < http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/193165 > [accessed January 2019].

history of criticism that would connect the benighted imagination, its underside, with guileful machinations in a playful and provocative account of her ability. Early modern philosophy frequently mapped the association of light/dark onto a mind with/without reasoning faculties. For example, in *A Treatise of Melancholie* (1586), Timothie Bright notes that, where 'naturall light is darkened', fancies arise 'vaine, false and voide of ground'.[39] Here, reason is associated with light, and imagination, darkness. For Bright, the darkness brings 'false illusion' which, by the light, 'is discerned to be an abuse of fancie'.[40] Burton, too, asks 'what will not a fearfull man conceave in the darke; what strange formes of Divels, Witches, Goblins?'[41] Thus, though Cavendish preserves Bright's association of the mind with light and dark, she inverts their effects – it is instead in darkness, a darkness promoted by melancholy (which, as she wrote in 'A Dialogue between Melancholy, and Mirth', 'hates the *Light*, in *darknesse* onely found' (*PF,* 77)), that the imagination flourishes. The psychological symptoms of melancholy might therefore go beyond the ungrounded fear and sadness registered by Burton; Cavendish's work repeatedly affirms that an additional symptom (if it might be called that) is an inclination to create.

Cavendish's belief that she was not suffering, but rather benefitting, from her condition no doubt had ramifications for her search for a cure. As the bucket of cold water episode attests, she looks less for a cure, than for a means to control or augment her illness. One might therefore compare Cavendish's experience with another

[39] Timothie Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholie* (London, 1586), p. 125– 6.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Burton, *Anatomy,* 1. 2. 3. 2, p. 124.

melancholic author, Robert Burton, who presents writing not as a symptom of his illness, but as an antidote. Indeed, his *Anatomy* goes some way towards commending his work with its own therapeutic power: for him, there is 'no fitter evacuation' than writing.[42] However, for all his belief in its curative capability, Burton's resolve to write about melancholy proves fatal. His intent to 'write of Melancholy, by being busy to avoid Melancholy' is configured as a compulsive cycle, 'one must needs scrat where it itcheth', he writes.[43] His epitaph, written by himself, shares the same cyclical nature: 'Hic iacet Democritus Junior, cui vitam dedit et mortem Melancholia' ['here lies Democritus Junior, to whom melancholy gave life and death'].[44] Indeed, by January 1640, the rumours of Christ Church, Oxford held that he 'sent his Soul up to Heaven thro' a slip about his Neck'; having calculated his nativity, Burton predicted his own death for his sixty-third year, and later commentators rather sceptically suggested that he had killed himself 'to give celebrity to the accuracy of his art'.[45] Though the story is most likely apocryphal (contemporary accounts on the death of astrologers typically involved their suicide), the notion that Burton's death was linked to his melancholy remained and was committed to history by the man himself.

As has been shown, Cavendish, too, claims to 'ease her mind' by writing; both she

[42] Burton, *Anatomy*, 'Democritus to the Reader', p. 6.

[43] Burton, *Anatomy*, 'Democritus to the Reader', p. 6.

[44] Burton, *Anatomy,* 'Democritus to the Reader', p. 6.

[45] Anthony Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses: An Exact History of All the Writers and Bishops Who Have Had Their Education in the most ancient and famous University of Oxford,* Volume 2 (London: Tho. Bennet, 1692), p. 653; John Lempriere, *Universal Biography containing a Copious Account, Critical and Historical, of the Life and Character, Labors and Actions of Eminent Persons in All Ages and Countries, Conditions and Professions,* Volume 1 (New York, 1810), p. 255.

and Burton sought to be distracted by the very thing that tortured them, perpetuating, rather than ceasing, their malady. For Cavendish, however, melancholy is a prerequisite of her occupation as a poetess; without the condition, she would lose her vocation. She writes:

> Tis true, my Verses came not out of Jupiter's Head; therefore they cannot prove a Pallas: yet, they are like Chast Penelope's Work, for I wrote them in my Husband's absence, to delude Melancholy Thoughts, and avoid Idle Time. (*PF*, 122)

She does not openly seek a cure for her melancholy, at least not through writing. The condition is rather something on which her writing depends. While Burton's hope is to ease, if not cure, his symptoms, Cavendish wants to 'delude' her thoughts, a nuance that polarises their experience.[46] Burton's attempts to 'avoid' his melancholy suggests an escape or absconding from the condition, but, like her use of 'subtil', Cavendish's 'delude' carries with it far more deceptive and beguiling connotations. To 'delude' suggests that she intends, not to escape melancholy, but channel it for a different means – she makes her physical complaint, a psychological asset.

With her reference to Penelope, Cavendish adds another dimension to the weaving images already present in her work. She identifies with Penelope's deception of her would-be suitors, inviting her reader to peruse her work, and her melancholic condition, as one that ravels and unravels itself – is hers an account of a true experience

[46] Burton, *Anatomy*, 'Democritus to the Reader', p. 6.

or a lived aesthetic? Her work is intended to 'delude' melancholy thoughts, but is also generated by them; her struggle is cyclical and incurable without the apparent sacrifice of her talent. Throughout her oeuvre, then, her melancholy oscillates between that which affects the mind and that which affects the body, as Cavendish's materialism confronts her belief that the truest presentation of that condition is, in fact, psychological.

The most sustained account of this is found in one of her early texts, *The World's Olio* (1655), a similar miscellany of poetry and essays as *Poems and Fancies.* In it, Cavendish is clear to distinguish between 'a dull or Melancholy disposition proceeding from the Body, and the Melancholy proceeding from the Soul' (*TWO*,118). In the former, Cavendish details a process by which 'a heavy black Humour' – 'cold thick' and 'slimy' – penetrates the body, 'stupifies the Senses, and quenches the Natural heat' (*TWO*,119). In such cases, she continues, the body 'like stone, Walls up, or imprisons the Soul, or Mind, wherein it can neither be Active nor Free'. Those with this 'dull' disposition 'hath few Desires, and reguards not any thing, nor takes pleasure in Life, but lives as if it lived not'. By comparison, what Cavendish decides to call 'true' melancholy is a 'serious consideration',

> [I]t examines the Worth and Nature of every thing; it seeks after Knowledge, and Understanding; it observes strictly, and most commonly distinguisheth judiciously, applyeth aptly, acteth with ingenuosity, useth Time wisely, lives honestly, dies contentedly, and leaves a Fame behind it. (*TWO*,119)

Accordingly, then, Cavendish suggests that the only form of genuine, 'true', melancholy is one that inspires the 'Soul', which she uses interchangeably for the 'Mind' in this instance, to intellectual enquiry and creative pursuit. In turn, and most significantly, melancholy should bring a greatness that carries recognition, leaving 'Fame behind it'; the allegorical world of the would-be poet-luminary is therefore traced thus:

> Melancholy is the North-Pole, Envy the South, Choler is the Torrid Zone, and Ambition is the Zodiack… (*TWO*,101)

Here, Melancholy and Envy act as the celestial poles, providing the axis of rotation for the world in question; they are fixed points, the foundational principles that structure and frame Cavendish's existence. Outside of this is the zodiac, Ambition, which directs the movement of the principal planet, the writer herself – her ambition coordinates her melancholic condition. It is therefore fitting that this text should begin with a petition to Fortune, whom she asks to 'place [her] Book in Fames high Tow'r […] that all the World shall hear it' (*TWO*,sig. A2r).

Taken together, the ennoblement of Cavendish's melancholy in these texts is, I would argue, symptomatic of her increasing fascination with its impact on, and connection to, the mind throughout her career. Of course, she never abandons the opposing view that melancholy only impacts the body, but it is likely that, as her career progressed, the idea that her illness – historically linked to genius – may facilitate her creative mind and, moreover, secure her reputation, had growing appeal:

> For as Envie is a vice, so Emulation is a Vertue, but Emulation is in the way to Ambition, or indeed it is a Noble Ambition, but I fear my Ambition inclines to vain-glory, for I am very ambitious, yet 'tis neither for Beauty, Wit, Titles, Wealth or Power, but as they are steps to raise me to Fames Tower, which is to live by remembrance in after-ages; […] for though I am naturally bash-full, yet in such a cause my Spirits would be all on fire. (*NP,* 389)

Here, in her memoir, *A True Relation* (1656), the nexus of melancholy, envy and ambition is ratified: it is her envy of others, her ambition to match and exceed them, that fires her spirits and burns her humours. If ambition is the catalyst and fame the ultimate goal, then melancholy – the burning 'adust' kind – is the conduit. As this section has demonstrated, rather than proving Cavendish's paranoia about her health, the Portland manuscript can be read in tandem with her fictional work as evidence of her repeated attempts to verify her illness so as to preserve and maintain her assumed identity as a troubled female genius. And her assumption of melancholy with its concomitant genial traits was not only limited to her writing but was an aesthetic she embraced throughout her daily life. Her experience of the condition is thus far more nuanced than Cavendish scholars have hitherto believed it be - a self-professedly gloomy disposition caused by a life punctuated by death and political isolation. Rather, the symptoms, experience and effects of the condition as detailed by Cavendish or her fictional personas feed into a wider strategy of authorship in which melancholy plays a convenient role. The condition has an almost alchemical part to play in the representation of her conversion from aspiring poet to famed icon.

Chapter Six

Angels and Cavaliers: Cavendish's Female Genii

i. Gender and Genius: Approaching Schiesari's Study

The next two chapters will explore more thoroughly what the concept of 'genius' meant to Cavendish, specifically how her adaptation of the genial melancholic tradition was represented in her work as well as how she herself looked to fulfil the role of female exemplar. A cohesive assessment of Cavendish's contribution to this field, spanning both gender studies and that on intellectual history, might start with what has already been written about the female sufferer/experient. A frequently quoted text on the subject is Juliana Schiesari's *The Gendering of Melancholia* (1992), which offers an expansive study on the indefatigable nexus of melancholy and genius in the work of various commentators, from Hildegard of Bingen to Sigmund Freud. Principally, Schiesari is concerned with the repeated insistence that, throughout history, such a phenomenon was only experienced by the privileged male. Her intention is, she writes, 'to show how the discourse of melancholia legitimates that neurosis as culturally acceptable for particular men'.[1] In her study, melancholy is figured as both a medical condition and 'a discursive practice' in which the melancholic, or he who adopts the title of melancholic, is 'legitimated in the representation of *his* artistic trajectory'.[2] Alongside, or in spite of,

1 Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia*, p. 15.

2 Ibid.

their clinical diagnosis, the subject can and perhaps *must* demonstrate their authenticity through their creative works and literary self-fashioning. As such, Schiesari explicates two forms of melancholy according to the mind/body dialectic discussed in the previous chapter, but this time divides the condition by gender: 'nothing more eloquently expresses what I call the gendering of melancholia than [the] split between a higher–valued form understood as male and a lower-valued one coded as female'.[3] While the former is characterised 'by representation itself', the latter is frequently represented in literature by 'an incapacity to translate symptoms' into language.[4] Butler, Irigaray and Kristeva also acknowledge the mute suffering of female experients that had little changed from one century to another; women's estrangement from language is explained by 'an estrangement from the self, associated with the inevitably masculine 'author' of the 'self-narrative', that pervades the literary canon.[5]

According to Schiesari's formula, then, Cavendish subverts the melancholic tradition at every turn. Not only does she aspire beyond the 'banality' of the bodily disease, but she does so through the medium of her own work.[6] She does so by allowing *herself* access to this tradition, again through her 'discursive practice[s]'. Indeed, besides her autobiography, in the prefatory material to every text, Cavendish is clear to reiterate her 'self-narrative' in her own words. The development of her authorial persona is assured: 'I did verily believe that this would have been my last work: but I find it will

[3] Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia*, p. 16.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Jennifer Radden, *Moody Minds Distempered: Essays on Melancholy and Depression* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 45.

[6] Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia*, p. 16.

not, unless I dye before I have writ my other intended piece' (*P*, sig. A3r). It would seem that only an untimely death could quell Cavendish's inclination to create. Though Schiesari does not rule out the possibility of the aspirational woman, her references to the encoding of melancholia are, perhaps, too resolutely divided: 'the great melancholic of yesteryear would have been a tortured but creative male genius', while the lower form (which she problematically equates with modern-day depression) is left to the 'unhappy and unproductive woman'.[7] The former is empowered, the latter disempowered, she suggests; but what of Cavendish, who empowers *herself* to the position of privileged experient? As both an aspirant to melancholic genius and a woman, the Duchess confounds Schiesari's binary distinctions.

The fashioning of the authorial self in Cavendish's fictional and autobiographical work looks to position the author in line with a tradition which linked melancholy to creative vigour, even genius. To what extent this authorial persona is, or at least is identified with, Cavendish herself is open to interpretation; of course, there is a limit to what can be known about the 'true' lives of historical figures. Beyond her seventeenth-century contemporaries, Virginia Woolf was likely the first commentator to suggest that Cavendish, the 'crazy Duchess', could have been mentally ill.[8] Opinions later changed, however, as Lisa Walters suggested in 2014, there is 'scant evidence' to prove that Cavendish experienced 'any type of mental disorder'.[9] Hero Chalmers, too, is one of many who argue that the myth of 'Mad Madge' was 'not the product of psychological

[7] Ibid.

[8] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own,* ed. by Mark Hussey (New York: Mariner Books, 2005), p. 61.

[9] Walters, *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Science and Politics,* p. 33.

factors but of cultural and historical conditions'.[10] Though Deborah Bazeley acknowledges Cavendish's affiliation to the 'unhappy relationship' between learned women and mental illness, she insists that 'despite popular perception, Cavendish was not mad'.[11] Instead, she is deemed only rebellious: her flagrant defiance of contemporary gender codes meant that she was pigeonholed as a lunatic, her words reduced to the babblings of a madwoman.

Of course, the letters between Newcastle and Mayerne are evidence enough to prove Cavendish's ill health with a condition that *could* affect the mind, even if its extent or severity is obscured by her tendency to self-diagnose as well as the unreliability of her authorial voice (as well as those of Mayerne and Newcastle). The central premise of Schiesari's argument – that the discourse of the condition was thought to legitimate neurosis – is pertinent to Cavendish's own narratives, fictional and biographical. It is a formula that Cavendish appeals to not only in her work, but in her personal life (as the Portland papers prove) in which her neurosis is reclaimed. Cavendish's case-study is thus a telling preappropriation of the 'Mad Madge' myth. Through her marginalisation as strange and disturbed, her discourse empowers herself to the status of troubled prodigy through the implicit connection between her 'illness' and the productivity of her imagination. Both chapter six and chapter seven will explore the epistemological gulf between the Duchess' interpretation of the tradition and that upheld by the generations of men, and it would seem, compliant women before her. Thus, whether her experience of melancholy is grounded in truth or not is irrelevant and may never be proven.

[10] Chalmers, *Royalist Women Writers*, p. 17.

[11] Bazeley, 'An Early Challenge to the Precepts and Practice of Modern Science', 1.2, p. 15.

Regardless, her attempt to portray her(self) as a sufferer should be recognised, as has been discussed in the previous chapters. In this context, Schiesari's *The Gendering of Melancholia* is an important point of reference, not only because of its frequent citation in critical texts on this subject, but because of its specific consideration of women's exclusion from the narrative of melancholy. This study is thus interested in extending Schiesari's hypotheses to suggest that women, Cavendish specifically, were also excluded from the narrative of *genius*.

On this point, Schiesari's own study is lacking: while she suggests that women are effectively written out of the discursive practice that legitimates genial melancholy and informs the cultural contexts in which Cavendish operated, *The Gendering of Melancholia* is decidedly lacking in accounts by historical women writers to illustrate this point. The most developed example is the Italian Renaissance poet, Isabella di Morra, who, according to Schiesari's analysis, readily accepts her disempowered status. Instead, the many examples of women's 'sense of lack' are delineated through the male gaze from Tasso to Shakespeare, a gaze coloured by, what would seem, an inherently misogynistic bias.[12] Accordingly, the notion of genius, especially the melancholic genius so desirable in seventeenth-century Europe, is configured as having a profound social component that held back women; as Irigaray suggests, women were denied 'access to the signifying economy' that fuelled the discursive practice of male melancholia.[13] This chapter will therefore adapt Schiesari's study, preserving the tenets of her approach while

[12] Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia*, p. 12.

[13] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman,* trans. by Gillian C. Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 71.

presenting Cavendish as an exception to them. Indeed, Cavendish's work defies the gender asymmetry and sociocultural obstructions registered by Schiesari and Irigaray respectively, or at least it attempts to. So, how successful was she in her pursuit of recognition?

ii. The Construction of 'Genius' in Cavendish's Writing

This question will be answered in two parts: firstly, through the evidence provided by Cavendish's own writing and how the notion of 'genius' is constructed and handled therein. Alongside this will be compared and contrasted the context in which Cavendish published her work, both to validate and, if necessary, challenge Schiesari's theory. Given the nature of melancholic genius as a '*habitus* of cultural empowerment', in Schiesari's words, chapter seven will then consider Cavendish's reputation amongst her contemporaries.[14] Though its main focus will be on her reception during her life and immediately after her sudden death in 1673, chapter seven will also consider it in the centuries that follow. In particular, it will look to map the responses to Cavendish's supposed madness and how this is – indeed, if it is – linked to her intellectual and creative ability, her 'genius'.

Like melancholy, though, genius has multiple and varied meanings. Alongside its historic use in reference to *genius loci* and other supernatural attendants or

[14] Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia*, p. 32.

intermediaries, the definition of 'genius' changed in its nuance throughout Cavendish's lifetime. The *OED* suggests that the word recognised an individual's 'natural aptitude for, or inclination towards, a specified thing' from 1611. Exactly a century later, however, the dictionary cites the first use of the term in the context of a conversely *unnatural*, 'exceptional' skill in a particular area.[15] Thus, throughout Cavendish's publishing career, falling between these two dates, the word 'genius' had a seemingly ambivalent signification.

In her own work, Cavendish's use of the term 'genius' moves between the referencing of the outstanding ability of particular authors – such as Ovid, Homer and Du Bartas – to a more generalised suggestion of shared knowledge and beliefs, 'the Genius of the Age' (*TWO,* sig. O3r). There is only one instance in which the term is explicitly applied to herself (her relatively unequivocal self, apart from her fictional personae); in the dedicatory letter that prefaces her husband's biography, Cavendish describes her fitness for authorship: 'it pleased God to command his servant Nature to indue me with a Poetical and Philosophical Genius, even from my birth' (*LWC,* sig. A1v–A2r). The various connotations of genius are gathered here for maximum emphasis; her fondness for writing is sanctioned by both natural and spiritual forces. In *Sociable Letters*, Cavendish's persona, too – whose association with the author is at times manifest and, at others, tenuous – makes clear this remarkable proclivity for writing,

[15] 'genius', *adj*. and *adv*. (8.b.) 'An exceptionally intelligent or talented person, or one with exceptional skill in a particular area of art, science, etc.', in use since 1711, *Oxford English Dictionary*, *OED* < http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/77607> [accessed January 2019], (7.a.) 'A person's natural aptitude for, or inclination towards, a specified thing or action'. in use since 1611, *Oxford English Dictionary*, *OED* <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/77607> [accessed January 2019].

suggesting that she produced sixteen 'Baby-books' written before the age of twelve (*SL,* 267). Though the books have 'neither Method nor Order', they serve to betray a talent which moves beyond the 'natural' connotations of genius to those of an extraordinary ability (*SL,* 267).

One must be careful not to construe Cavendish's use of 'genius' anachronistically. The idea of 'a genius' as a supreme individual imbued with original and creative ability was rather popularised throughout the late eighteenth century and particularly during the Romantic era. Cavendish might go some way towards appropriating these qualities, but could only anticipate the definition *in toto*. Rather than the supernatural connotations of the historic 'genius', then, Cavendish's interpretation of her own ability is preternatural; it is informed by natural and instinctual forces, but is simultaneously remarkable for its singularity, 'suspended between the mundane and the miraculous'.[16] There are, then, suggestions that Cavendish believed in her own genius; however, these are only sporadic glimpses and are not repeated at any length throughout her oeuvre, at least not enough to establish a pattern. In the absence of a prevailing definition of genius throughout her lifetime, one must look to its concomitant themes as they appear in her work. One frequent example is the idea that she is 'ahead of [her] time',

> For my part I do, for I verily beleeve, that ignorance and present envie will slight my book; yet I make no question, when envy is worn out by time, but

[16] Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150 – 1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), p. 14.

> understanding will remember me in after ages, when I am changed from this life; but I had rather live in general remembrance, then in a particular life (*PPO,* 53)

As Andrew Robinson notes, 'genius is the name we give to a quality of work that transcends fashion, fame, and reputation […] genius abolishes both the time and the place of its origin'.[17] Cavendish has assurance in the future attribution of her genius 'in after ages', in which her name will be immortalised 'in general remembrance'. Here, too, she taps into the social dimension of 'genius' and the strikingly modern idea that the title was not claimed for oneself, but rather attributed by others as an accretion of sociocultural perceptions.

Beyond this, the most revealing and developed deliberations of genius, and the fame that promised to accompany it, are found in Cavendish's dramatic works. There are no records that any of her plays were performed during her lifetime and scholars have since assumed that they were never intended for the stage. Indeed, the collection has been disparaged by its readers for its 'sprawling, unstageable' content.[18] Cavendish, too, anticipated their lack of popularity: that they 'might tire the spectators who are forced or bound by the rules of civility to sit out a play, if they be not sick', though she does acknowledge the 'spectators' not the 'readers' of her dramatic work (*P,* sig. A4r). Both Linda Payne and Gweno Williams have identified sufficiently performative elements of the plays that, they believe, would allow for their staging; Williams developed

[17] Andrew Robinson, *Genius*: *A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 2.

[18] Warren Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 199.

Cavendish's 'The Convent of Pleasure' into a stage production in 1995, choosing the play for its 'self-conscious' theatricality and 'nuanced awareness' of genre.[19]

Aside from their uncertain dramatic mode, Cavendish's collection of plays is notable for developing female characters, both the modest conservative and radical proto-feminist. Of particular concern for the Duchess throughout her dramatic oeuvre was the fate of married women; exploring the machinations of her female characters to avoid 'the incumbered life', Cavendish diametrically opposes matrimony and freedom, specifically, female freedom of thought and action: 'Do you call that a triumphant day, that inslaves a woman all her life after[?]', one Lady asks (*P,* 66). The alternative that frequently enchants Cavendish's female players is that of a public life, both speaking to, and writing for, public consumption.

One might imagine, then, that Cavendish found her closest avatar in Sanspareille, the heroine of *Youths Glory and Deaths Banquet* (published as part of her *Playes* volume in 1662). The main plot of the play follows Lady Sanspareille's rejection of marriage in order to pursue her intellectual ambitions, which – if they cannot be quelled by marriage – are halted by the heroine's untimely death. Her success in oratory, manifested in five lengthy, erudite monologues, is fostered by her doting father – 'Father Love' – whose

[19] Linda Payne, 'Dramatic Dreamscape: Women's Dreams and Utopian Visions in the Works of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle' in Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski, eds., *Curtain Calls: British and American Women and the Theater, 1660– 1820* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991), pp. 18– 33 (p. 30); for more on William's production, see Alison Findlay, '(En)Gendering Performance: Staging Plays by Early Modern Women' in Jane Donawerth and Adele F. Seeff, eds. *Crossing Boundaries: Attending to Early Modern Women* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000), pp. 289– 308 (p. 299).

obsessive concern for his daughter's success has been deemed incestuous by some.[20] The intense, and at times passionate, relationship between the two as tutor and pupil mimics that of Cavendish and Newcastle, whose prefatory dedications to each other and collaborations within this volume reveal a very similar mix of devotion and tutelary encouragement. Indeed, Lady Sanspareille's account of her ambition to achieve fame amongst her contemporaries echoes many of Cavendish's own aspirations set out in *Poems and Fancies* at the beginning of her career:

FATHER But what makes thee sad, my child?

SANSPAREILLE Ambition, Sir.

FATHER What doth your ambition aim at? If it be honour, I have an Estate will buy thee an Honourable Husband […] It cannot be for wit and beauty, for, surely nature hath made her self poor, in giving you so much.

SANSPAREILLE My dear Father, know it is fame I covet, for which were the ambitions of Alexander and Caesar joyned into one mind, mine doth exceed them […], my mind is restless to get the highest place in Fames high Tower. (*P,* 130)

It is telling that Father Love should first offer his daughter a husband and, secondly, riches to satiate her desire. In doing so, he demarcates the contemporary parameters in which women, like Sanspareille, should contain their aspirations – worldly ambitions

[20] See Cecile M. Jagodzinski, *Privacy and Print: Reading and Writing in Seventeenth– Century England* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), p. 123 and Gweno Williams, ''No *Silent Woman*': The Plays of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle' in Alison Findlay, Stephanie Hodgson– Wright and Gweno Williams, eds., *Women and Dramatic Production 1550– 1700* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 95–122 (p. 166).

should be experienced vicariously, her interest is instead limited to the domestic estate, assuaged by 'Diamonds, Silver and Gold' (*P,* 129). In response, Cavendish revisits her own boisterous paratextual material citing Alexander and Caesar ('though I have neither Power, Time, nor Occasion, to be a great Conqueror, like *Alexander*, or *Cesar*; yet rather than not be Mistress of a World […] I have made one of my own', *BW,* sig. A2v). Lady Sanspareille thus figures as a textual surrogate through which the playwright's vision is reimagined: Alexander and Caesar, strategists and visionaries, represent the possibility of empowerment through engagement with the public world in order, ultimately, to conquer it.

As the manifestation of Cavendish's female genius, then, Sanspareille's insatiable desire to be seen, heard and remembered is an inextricable product of her extraordinary intelligence, a testimony to the societal aspect of genius, in which the title was not self-proclaimed, but earned and bestowed by one's contemporaries. Having revealed in one of her monologues that in her mind 'thoughts of mirth and melancholy strives', Sanspareille makes a direct reference to the tradition of melancholic genius to which she, and her creator, aspire (*P,* 129). Addressing the nature of the passions, she proclaims:

> [B]ut in the passion of pure love, for the most part, dwels naturally Melancholly: I mean, not that dry, cold, sharp humour, bred in the body, which makes it *Insipid*, inclosing the Soul, (as it were,) within Walls of stone, which causeth a dull, heavy, and stupid disposition, as it oppresseth, and lyes, like a heavy burthen on the Soul, hindering the active effects thereof; but this naturall Melancholly, dwells not

> in every Soul, but onely in the noblest; for it is the noblest effect, of the noblest passion, in the noblest Soul. (*P*, 142)

This division of melancholy here echoes that discussed in *The World's Olio,* published seven years earlier, in which the body and mind, dullness and enthusiasm are opposed. It is clear that Cavendish's views on the subject had little changed, and she now chooses to repeat them again in a character who seemingly embodies the qualities of the nobler kind at the expense of her obligations as a woman, and as a wife. Of course, Cavendish did not share Sanspareille's view of marriage; indeed, she speaks of her own marriage as one of 'Souls, Bodies, and Brains', (*P,* sig. A6r). Newcastle did not curb her endeavours, but rather encouraged her venture into print, evidenced in his willingness to contribute his own scenes to this play and many others in the volume. On this issue, then, any direct identification of the creator and the created breaks down. However, I would argue that, rather than offering a direct critique of marriage, Cavendish's play uses the social ritual as an emblem for the codified suppression of female ambition. Sanspareille's dissatisfaction with married life takes on synecdochic significance; marriage was a, if not *the*, means to distract women from their public aspirations by penning them in the private realm, thereby reinforcing and consolidating the view that modesty and domesticity were the absolutes of womanhood.

One should be careful about extrapolating from Cavendish's concern here for *a* woman to a concern for *all* women. It should be made clear that, despite her discontent, Sanspareille's defence of women and womanhood is inadvertent; publicly, she suggests

that 'speaking belongs as much to the Female Sex as to the Masculine', but, in her private musings with Father Love, her motivations are otherwise:

SANSPAREILLE [I]t is not a vulgar fame I covet, for those that goeth with equal space, and even hights, are soon lost, as in a crowd or multitude; but when fame is inthron'd, all Ages gazes at it; *and being thus supremely plac'd up high; Like as an Idol, gets Idolatry:* Thus singularity as well as merit, advances fame. (emphasis in the original text – *P,* 130)

There is a division between the player's public and private words that is tellingly mirrored in Cavendish's own work. Throughout her oeuvre, the main body of Cavendish's discourse often propounds an egalitarian ideology, particularly on education for *all* women. This is, however, repeatedly undercut by the obstinate desire for individual celebrity that occupies much of the paratextual material that introduces her work. As Cavendish and her avatar would have it, any veneration short of idolatry is 'vulgar'. Indeed, Sanspareille's name (French for 'without parallel') hardly suggests a proto-feminist sentiment; rather, Cavendish looks to single out her heroine as an exception to, if not the pinnacle of, her sex. Like Cavendish, then, who would be 'a World, or nothing', Sanspareille would be merited or 'dye like beasts, forgotten of mankind, and […] buried in Oblivions grave' (*P,* 130).

Does Lady Sanspareille's determination to succeed publicly, to defy the gender codes that bind her to marriage, determine her death at the end of the play? Indeed, the prospect of marriage is never far away, when presenting to an auditorium of sceptical

philosophers, Sanspareille is dressed '*all in white Satin, like as a Bride, and her Father and her audience, which are all Lovers*' (*P,* 158). Despite her learnedness, Sanspareille's circle of influence is still limited to that of a prospective wife and a life of compliance: 'Man being accounted the Supremer Creature, and always bearing Rule, he shall be first placed', she concedes (*P,* 159). And yet, she continues to suggest that for men, too, marriage is detrimental: for those who, like her, pursue a contemplative life, it 'cuts off Phancies Wings, and quenches out the Poetical Fire, it breaks the Engine of invention, disturbs sweet contemplation, corrupts honest Counsels, obstructs Heroick actions' and, most importantly, 'obscures fame' (*P,* 159). As the play progresses, Sanspareille appears to convince, if not charm, many of her male admirers to her subversive rhetoric. In Act 1 Scene 7, a scene notably written by Newcastle ('*This scene of the Phylosophers the Lord Marquess wit*'), a group of philosophers anticipate the Lady's speech with suspicion:

> 1. PHILOSOPHER [S]o smooth her brow, as not to admit one Philosophycall wrinckle, and she to teach, a Monster tis in Nature; since Nature hath denyed that sex fortitude of brain. (*P,* 134)

It is telling that Newcastle should present the unwrinkled brow of female beauty and the 'fortitude of brain', knowledge and intellect, as seemingly incompatible. By Act 3 Scene 8, however, two gentlemen meet to discuss 'the miracle of the age', the 'great Honour to our Nation', whose oratory paves 'a New way' (*P,* 163). It would seem, then, that Sanspareille's fame is assured; they recommend 'a Statue for her self, as well as a Library for her works' be built to commemorate her success in her own age and those to follow (*P,* 163). However, her success is not and, I would argue, *cannot* be sustained: her

attempt not only to occupy the world of male-dominated learning, but to destabilise the robust and hegemonic system that guaranteed its supremacy, means that she must, necessarily, be reduced to nothing.

As Sara Mendelson would have it, Cavendish contrives Lady Sanspareille's death in order to consecrate her status as idol. She is almost sanctified, her hearse covered in white satin with a silver crown and surrounded by six virgins in accordance with her wishes. Cavendish is able to, Mendelson suggests, 'experience the vicarious pleasure of being present at her own alter ego's apotheosis in a magnificent funeral'.[21] I would argue, however, that Lady Sanspareille's death is devised for an altogether different reason. Indeed, the exact nature of Sanspareille's illness is not disclosed:

FATHER LOVE Come, Come Child, there are such expectations without for thee; but what makes thee to look so heavy?

SANSPAREILLE Truly Sir, I am not well.

FATHER LOVE Not well? Heaven bless thee; where art thou Sick?

SANSPAREILLE I cannot say I am very sick, or in any great pain; but I find a general alteration in me, as it were a fainting of the spirits. (*P,* 166)

The cause of her illness is, I would suggest, a gendered one; the 'fainting of the spirits' suggests a fatal weakening of the body as her suitably frail, feminine body becomes

[21] Sara Mendelson, 'Playing Games with Gender and Genre: the Dramatic Self– Fashioning of Margaret Cavendish' in Line Cottegnies and Nancy Weitz, eds., *Authorial Conquests: Essays on Genre in the Writing of Margaret Cavendish* (Madison State: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), pp. 195– 212 (p. 206).

increasingly ill-suited to her occupation. Her body simply cannot sustain the immensity of her wit, and so she must die. In this sense, then, Sanspareille's death is less a celebration of the pinnacle of her fame, than a parody, if a tragic one, of the contemporary view of the female body as 'but a small and weak vessell', incompatible with intelligence and authority (*P,* 131).

iii. Weakness and Woman: The Physiological Evidence

Seven years earlier, in her second miscellany text, *The World's Olio* (1655), Cavendish had acknowledged the limitations of the female body: 'there is a great difference', she writes, 'betwixt the masculine brain and the feminine, the masculine strength and the feminine' (*TWO,* sig. A4r). The nature of Sanspareille's death thereby engages with contemporary medical theory on the composition of male and female bodies. As Mark Breitenberg maintains in his reading of Burton's *Anatomy*, the Galenic humoral model on which much of seventeenth-century medicine was still grounded, supposed that 'the body's fluids are carefully […] regulated according to what is allowed to enter and what must be expelled'.[22] This model, however, presumed a 'normative' masculine subject in which 'all members of the body act properly in accordance with their assigned places and designated functions'.[23] The priority for each individual (male) body was to maintain equilibrium, defending against the dangers of excess or lack in a

[22] Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 38.
[23] Ibid.

humoral homeostasis. By contrast, the female body was treated with suspicion; indeed, the loss of blood through menstruation, though predictable, evidenced the inability of the female body to regulate its own humours. Fundamentally orifical and incontinent, then, a woman's body was deemed a literally 'leaky vessel', menstruating, crying and lactating.[24] This lack of bodily self-control became an unfavourable symptom of womanhood and femininity. In his commonplace book (1603–1655), Nicholas Le Strange records a joke told by his brother-in-law,

> When man and woman were first made, they had each of them a lace given to lace their bodies together, the man had just enough to lace himself home, so he left his Tag hanging down; the womans proved somewhat too short, and seeing she must leave some of her body open, in a rage she broke off her Tag, and threw it away.[25]

Though the joke primarily considers the difference between male and female genitalia, the upshot is telling; the female body is decidedly incomplete, vulnerable and left open.

If a woman's physiology was defined by its permeability and moisture, a male body was characterised – in a 'normative' state –by dryness and the heat necessary to maintain it so. In the Galenic tradition, innate heat is associated with a living being's soul and vital spirit and, as the hotter sex of the two, man was closer to bodily perfection,

[24] Paster, ''Leaky Vessels: The Incontinent Women of City Comedy', pp. 43– 65.

[25] Nicholas Le Strange, H.F. Lippincott, ed., *Merry Passages and Jeasts: A Manuscript Jest Book of Sir Nicholas Le Strange (1603– 1655)* (Salzburg: University of Salzburg Press, 1974), p. 101, cited in Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 20.

more rational, creative, active and strong: 'temperate heat and driness are the chiefe causes of a good wit', Burton writes.[26] By comparison, he quotes Avicenna, 'a cold and moist Braine is an unseparable companion to folly'.[27] The woman's constitution thus seemed to justify the 'natural imbecility' of her sex; in her article on 'The Unbearable Coldness of Female Being', Gail Kern Paster suggests that,

> [R]ationality was less cold and clammy than irrationality […] It followed logically that most men were thought to have better perceptual and cognitive apparatuses – better hardware, software, and wetware – than most women and were thus able to report more rationally and reliably about the world.[28]

Indeed, in the prefatory material to *The World's Olio*, Cavendish acknowledges this tradition (however feigned this modesty may seem when compared to her otherwise fiercely ambitious narrative), 'it cannot be expected I should write so wisely and wittily as men, being of the effeminate sex, whose brains Nature hath mixed with the coldest and softest elements' (*TWO,* sig. A4r). In contemporary medical theory, then, Sanspareille's fainting episode might be explained by the fact that her body was producing animate 'spirits' more quickly than her heart and brain could administer them (the spirits being, according to Galenic medicine, the communicators between mind and body). Elsewhere in her '*Playes*' volume, in the play titled *The Lady*

[26] Burton, *Anatomy,* 1. 3. 3. 1, p. 264.

[27] Burton, *Anatomy,* 1. 2. 5. 3, p. 225.

[28] Gail Kern Paster, 'Unbearable Coldness of Female Being: Women's Imperfection and the Humoral Economy', *English Literary Renaissance*, 28.3 (1998), pp. 416–440 (p. 419).

Contemplation, Cavendish reveals an awareness of such a theory which she chooses to ventriloquise through another studious heroine, the eponymous Lady:

> [I[f the senses be imperfect, or the objects more than can be well dissent, or too many for the temper of the brain, or that the brain be too cold, or to hot, then the Soul or mind, like the body, decayes. (*P,* 147)

Given their 'hot bloud', men were more resilient and receptive to the speed and intensity of excitable spirits, their hearts made 'large and great' to process the 'abundaunce'.[29]

The notion of female genius therefore threatened to subvert the theory of temperature that underpinned early modern medicine, which was, in turn, influenced by the medical tenets of ancient Greece. According to the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata,* there were three categories of melancholy: the uninspired, the diseased and the scholarly. In the former, the cold humour clogged the mental faculties to make the individual 'sluggish'.[30] On the other hand, in the other two categories, the excess bile was heated, exciting the individual to madness, inspiration and amour. What separates the two is the duration for which the heat is maintained. If heated for too long, the individual's spirits overwhelm the mind to frenzy. Rather, genial melancholy relied on

[29] Stephen Batman, *Batman vppon Bartholome His Booke De Proprietatibus Rerum, Newly Corrected, Enlarged and Amended: With Such Additions as are Requisite, vnto Euery Seuerall Booke: Taken Foorth of the Most Approued Authors, the Like Heretofore Not Translated in English* (London, 1582), p. 74.
[30] Aristotle (or a follower of Aristotle), 'Problems Connected with Thought, Intelligence, and Wisdom', in *Problems* quoted in Jennifer Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy,* p. 58.

the ability to temper heat to 'a moderate amount'.[31] The phenomenon of the female genius not only demanded that her conventionally cold physiology be heated, but that she, the 'leaky vessel', command enough power over her body to then regulate its temperature. Though Cavendish tantalises her readers and critics with the prospect of such a figure in the shape of Sanspareille, ultimately, the heroine's ambition and travail excite the spirits to a state beyond her body's capability. Her spirits, overwhelmed, grow 'faint' and she dies.

To determine the significance of Sanspareille's death, one must look to the fate of other heroines in Cavendish's canon and compare their denouements. Indeed, both Jacqueline Broad and Geraldine Wagner insist that various heroines in her oeuvre blatantly resist the patriarchal convention of Galenic medicine and its coterminous theory of temperature (it should be noted that neither considers the case of Sanspareille).[32] Wagner and Marina Leslie cite the example of the Empress in *The Blazing World,* whose voyage to her soon-to-be kingdom begins when her ship drifts towards the North Pole. The coldness at the Pole proving 'insupportable' to life, the men aboard the ship are 'frozen to death', only she remains alive 'by the light of her Beauty, the heat of her Youth' (*BW,* 2). This instance of a woman's heat surpassing her male counterparts, they suggest, demonstrates Cavendish's attempt to resist the 'determinism

[31] Ibid.

[32] Jacqueline Broad, 'Cavendish, van Helmont and the Mad Raging Womb', in Judy A. Hayden, ed., *The New Science and Women's Literary Discourse: Prefiguring Frankenstein* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 47– 63 (p. 60); Geraldine Wagner, 'Romancing Multiplicity: Female Subjectivity and the Body Divisible in Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World', Early Modern Literary Studies*, 9.1 (2003), paragraphs. 1– 59 (paragraph. 6) <https://purl.oclc.org/emls/09–1/wagnblaz.htm> [accessed January 2019].

of humoral psychology'.[33] I would argue, however, that Cavendish does not seek to overthrow the notion of temperature as it is in Galen in such a definitive way; rather she petitions for relative freedom within its parameters, though this freedom is frequently frustrated by social and cultural contexts.

Throughout her work, Cavendish offers multiple instances in which heat and cold are not polarised, but made compatible. In *The Blazing World,* for example, one of the major discoveries of the new world used to astonish, terrorise and control its inhabitants is 'Fire-stone', a peculiar compound that sets alight when wet (*BW,* 62). The Empress uses the stone regularly in carefully orchestrated displays of power, such as walking on flaming water in an allusion to the miracle of Christ in the Gospel of Matthew (14:22–23). She is able to withstand the flames as the fire from this stone is 'weaker then if it had been fed by some other kind of fuel', 'by reason the water' which was poured on it (*BW*, 63). Fire and water, the essential elements of man and woman respectively, are made compatible here; the Empress is able to harness the component responsible for male dominance, but only when the potency of the flame is made tolerable by feminine waters. Her control and power is fragile. Indeed, one of the two chapels built to convert the inhabitants to her own religion is also built out of fire-stone, its flaming walls designed to reiterate the 'Sermons of Terror' she preaches within (*BW,* 62). The machinations of the chapel are described thus:

[33] Marina Leslie, *Renaissance Utopias and the Problem of History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 132.

> [W]hen she would have that Chappel where the Fire-stone was, appear all in flame, she had by the means of Artificial pipes, water conveighed into it, which by turning the Cock, did, as out of a Fountain, spring over all the room, and as long as the Fire-stone was wet, the Chappel seemed to be all in a flaming-fire. (*BW,* 62)

The Empress' power over fire is proven to be something of a hollow spectacle. The chapel '*seemed* to be' aflame. Cavendish does not attempt to stage a resistance to Galenic medical theory or the 'determinism of humoral psychology', but makes the reader complicit in an analogised verification of its tenets. Like Sanspareille's necessary death, the contrived machinations of the Empress' pyromanic tendencies draw back these women from the brink in which their success might appear to challenge the male/hot female/cold dichotomy. Like much of Cavendish's philosophical and political views, she pushes her narrative to its iconoclastic extremes, only to retreat to a conservative finale in which female ambition is curtailed through death or marriage. Both female figures in *The Blazing World,* the Empress and the Duchess, eventually return to their husbands, to discussing horsemanship and playwriting, in a life undisturbed by the Empress' foreign exploits: 'In these, and the like recreations, the Emperor, Empress, and the nobility pass their time', the text concludes (*BW,* 158).

Sanspareille's death in *Youth's Glory and Death's Banquet* is thus loaded with allegorical significance: Cavendish offers no answer to the social mores by which female ambition is predictably and prematurely snuffed out. By demonstrating both the potential of her learned heroine and her inescapable fate, Cavendish engages with the potential dangers of female education. Her intentions are evidenced in the conversations

between the two unnamed 'Gentlemen', whose bumbling dialogues serve as something of a relief from Sanspareille's didactic speeches. Yet, in what seems, at first, to be a seemingly trivial exchange, there are couched the divergent views of Cavendish's male contemporaries:

1. GENTLEMAN The Lady *Sanspareilles* wit, is as if it would over-power her brain.

2. GENTLEMAN O no, for her brain seems so well tempered, as if there were no conceptions, which springs therein, or propositions, or knowledge, presented thereunto; but it doth digest them with great ease, into a distinguishing understanding […]

1. GENTLEMAN She hath a Monstrous wit.

2. GENTLEMAN No, her wit is not a Monstrosity, but a generosity of Nature, it is Natures bounty to her. (*P,* 145)

The first gentleman's suggestion that Sanspareille may have a 'well tempered' brain, the portent of genius, is immediately countered with the insistence that such phenomenon, when found in a woman, is 'Monstrous'. Their conversation then leads into a short pastiche on the *querelle des femmes*, in which the learned woman is either a marvel or a monster. It is the same gentleman that resists the suggestion of her brilliance who goes on to prefigure the Lady's death, in which her body is over-powered, her wit unsustainable. And it is this position, shared by innumerable men in seventeenth-century Europe, that necessitates Sanspareille's untimely end, perpetuating an environment – bolstered by the tenets of ancient medicine – in which her genius is unwelcomed and untenable.

The protagonist of *Youths Glory and Deaths Banquet* is therefore a peculiar example of Battigelli's contention that Cavendish's heroines are 'always at odds with their world'.[34] Battigelli suggests that these women can be divided into two clear groups, the 'active cavalier' and the 'contemplative cavalier'; while the former, finding the external world unsatisfactory, attempts to change it, the latter retires from the world entirely.[35] Though Sanspareille's character is, undoubtedly, an 'active cavalier' in the first acts, she is *forcibly* retired from her world. Cavendish provides a foil for Sanspareille's character in Lady Innocence, who is comparatively eager to marry her suitor, Lord de L'Amour. As the drama unfolds, their prospect of marriage is ruined by Lady Incontinent, who falsely accuses Innocence of stealing a necklace. Supported by her two maids, Falsehood and Informer, Incontinent's story is believed and, consequently, Innocence's reputation spoiled. As a result, Lady Innocence, though never quite an 'active cavalier', retreats further into her own alternative world, blighted by the deleterious melancholy that Sanspareille had earlier contrasted to its genial variety:

[34] Battigelli, *Exiles of the Mind,* p. 26.

[35] Ibid. Battigelli does not make much active use of the term 'cavalier'; though she refers to both Cavendish and Newcastle as 'exiled cavaliers', which clearly alludes to their political loyalties (despite the capitalised 'Cavalier' not being used (p. 5)). Shortly after this, Battigelli cites John Evelyn's ditty – 'She look'd so like a Cavalier/ But that she had no beard' – in which 'cavalier' is associated with Cavendish's dress, her outward habit, rather than her disposition. Ultimately, I would argue that Battigelli's choice of 'cavalier' intends to reflect a broader suggestion of rebellion, perhaps even an infiltration, of widely held masculine ideals.

> O Gods! how willingly would I be buried in the grave with dust, and feast with worms, rather than live amongst mankind! […] For black despair, like Melancholy night, mustles my thoughts, and makes my Soul as blind. (*P,* 166–7)

In a very different, even polarised manner to Sanspareille, then, Lady Innocence, too, does not conform to the decorum of womanhood as laid out by her male peers. Despite her innocence, the weight of expectation is too great and the accusations of theft too damaging to sustain. Shortly before Sanspareille's own death, Lady Innocence commits suicide. Thus, while I would, in part, agree with Battigelli's division of the heroines into active and passive categories, both the primary and secondary plots of *Youths Glory and Deaths Banquet* culminate in the death of the principal woman; the 'active' woman is no more successful than the 'contemplative' in changing the nature of her external world. The use of 'cavalier' is also troublesome: it might recall the supporters of Charles I, interchangeable with 'Royalist' during Cavendish's lifetime. However, in this instance, Battigelli intends to suggest that these women make manifest an obstinate, dismissive, 'cavalier' attitude. This seems an inappropriate way to describe them, particularly those of the 'contemplative' variety. Surely, the word carries the very connotations of indecorum that Cavendish and her heroines were railing against.

Thus, the fate of both Sanspareille and Innocent, despite their obvious differences, indicts the stagnant situation of women in seventeenth-century England and on the Continent. The inevitable death of Lady Sanspareille, in particular, demonstrates the tragic destiny of learned women, who, if not shunned by their male peers, risked

pushing their bodies to fatal extremes. For a woman, genial melancholy involved a mortal conflict of obligation and subversion, as Sanspareille explains,

> But *I* must tell this Noble Assembly, their meeting hath occasioned a quarrel here; for bashfulnesse and confidence hath fought a Duel in my Cheeks, and left the staines of bloud there. (*P,* 161)

Her blushed cheek is not the result of modest innocence, so desirable in a woman, but rather the blood stains from a 'Duel' between her duties ('bashfulnesse') and desires ('confidence'). Juliana Schiesari's premise that 'melancholia is at best made available to woman as a debilitating disease and certainly not as an enabling ethos' is therefore complicated by Cavendish's ambitious heroine, who is at once enabled but eventually enervated.[36] Indeed, what Schiesari presents as the dichotomy of genius/illness rather takes the form of a spectrum in Cavendish's work: she allows her heroines to experience both at the same time.

iv. The Blush and the Battle: The Function of Hermaphroditism

In another of Cavendish's plays, *Loves Adventures,* this struggle between conformity and rebellion manifests itself plainly in the shape of Lady Orphant, whose venture into the military (in pursuit of her inamorato, Lord Singularity) is authenticated by her

[36] Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia,* p. 15.

adoption of a male persona, Affectionata. Like Sanspareille, Cavendish's heroine shares a melancholic temperament, which is here conveyed by means of sporadic short verses (Sanspareille's father had similarly informed her, 'My childe, it is a sign you are melancholly, that you are in a poetical vein', (*P,* 129)). The correlation between melancholy and poetry, or more specifically poetic expression, that punctuated Cavendish's own life is reiterated by her leading female player, though in a masculine disguise:

> For like as vapours from the Earth doth rise,
> And gather into clouds beneath the skies;
> Contracts to water, swelling like moist veins,
> When over-fill'd, falls down in showering rains:
> So thoughts, which form a grieved mind are sent,
> Ariseth in a vaporous discontent.
> Contracts to melancholly, which heavy lies
> Untill it melts, and runs forth through the eyes;
> Unless the Sun of comfort, dry doth drink
> Those watery tears that lyes at the eyes brink;
> Or that the rayes of joy, which streams bright out
> With active heat disperseth them about. (*P,* 59)

Affectionata would appear to describe the process by which black bile, catalysed by her 'grieved mind', was burnt in the gut to form melancholy adust, rising in a 'vaporous discontent'. However, given her hermaphroditic persona, the metaphors are mixed: her

experience of melancholy is described as a process of tempering, by which the vapours are repeatedly condensed, it lies 'heavy' and 'melts' through the eyes in tears, or is otherwise evaporated and dispersed into 'rayes of joy' by 'active heat'. The heat associated with 'active' masculinity and its productive interests in the public domain is directly opposed to the comparatively fruitless tears of the passive, retiring female. Cavendish seems to suggest that Affectionata's melancholy is more appropriately channelled, even ameliorated, by her ability to participate in public life by virtue of her transvestism.

Yet, in 1643, Charles I had issued a proclamation stating that 'no woman [should] to presume to Counterfeit her Sex by wearing mans apparel, under pain of the severest punishment which Law and our displeasure shall inflict'.[37] Women who dressed as the opposite sex in early modern England faced prosecution for fraud.[38] Just as Sanspareille's death is unavoidable, then, Affectionata's liminal state is inevitably precarious. Hurried by Singularity's suggestion that (s)he find a wife, she bemoans the transience of her liberty to think and act as a man,

> Besides, *I* have given the World cause to censure me, not only in concealing of my Sex, and changing of my habit, but being always in the company of Men, acting a masculine part upon the Worlds great Stage, and to the publick view; but could *I* live thus concealed, *I* should be happy, and free from censure: […] (*P,* 72)

[37] Quoted in Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality* (London: Batsford, 1986), p. 84.
[38] Ibid.

Since there is 'no remedy' to her dilemma, she will 'weep forth my sorrows, and with the water of my tears, I'll strive to quench the blushing heat, that like quick lightening, flashes in my face' (*P*, 72). She confesses her identity to Singularity, who quickly proposes their marriage. It is surely no coincidence that, with little choice but to abandon her masculine persona, the metonymy of female modesty – the flushed cheek – reasserts itself. Indeed, having called attention to her own blushing cheek, betraying the physiognomies of her sex, Sanspareille's next scene is that in which her health deteriorates.

For Cavendish's heroines, then, the blushing cheek is something of a harbinger of doom, signalling an end to their mischief in the male domain. While Sanspareille's end is brought about by her death, Lady Orphant's is by her becoming a wife. Hesitant to leave her life as Affectionata behind, she suggests that 'I will otherwise conceal my self, and live as an Anchoret from the view of the world', the closest alternative to living as man, spared from the submission and obedience concomitant to marriage (*P,* 74). Indeed, the anchorite (or 'anchoress') appears frequently throughout Cavendish's oeuvre as an idealised model of female freedom through eremitism. In her autobiography, Cavendish pledges to 'willingly exclude my self, so as Never to see the face of any creature, but my Lord, as long as I live, inclosing my self like an Anchoret' (*NP,* 390). In Cavendish's own experience, the bliss of married life – an enabling marriage in which her husband provides support and encouragement – is akin to the cloistered existence of the anchorite, who is conversely liberated through her withdrawal from society. For Lady Orphant, the promise of a similar marriage is appealing. It is Lord Singularity's suggestion that they 'shall be as one' (he just as 'pious

a devote' to her as she to him) that appears to convince her to accept his proposal (*P*, 75). Though their marriage is sealed with the promise that they 'both one constellation make', the attendant musicians' penultimate song implies the sacrifice she undertakes:

> Love in the younger age,
> Thou then turn'd Page;
> When love then stronger grew,
> The bright sword drew.
> Then Love it was thy fate,
> To advise in State.
> […] Then offered was my hap
> A *Cardinals* Cap.
> Loves juglings thus doth make
> The Worlds mistake. (*P,* 76)

During her time disguised as Affectionata, Lady Orphant commands esteem as both a 'Lieutenant-General' and a political strategist; her achievements are rewarded by the Pope, who first offers to canonise the page and then make him(/her) a Cardinal (*P,* 61). The wedding song (written by 'Lord *marquiss* of New-castle') ironically laments what Lady Orphant could have achieved were she not dissuaded by 'Loves juglings'; her impending marriage to Singularity, who *'[…]seems not to listen. All the time his eyes fixt on his Bride*', enacts 'the Worlds mistake' by which potentially influential women are rendered powerless (*P,* 76). And Singularity is not designed as a man who would permit her such freedoms; indeed, Cavendish presents him as something of a libertine. Early in

the play, he snubs marriage, his sole endeavour to 'lye with' his mistress (*P,* 34). Thus, in the play's final song that consecrates the couple's union, Neoplatonic and carnal images collide:

> Who can express the joys to night,
> 'Twil charm your senses to delight,
> Nay, all those pleasures you'l control,
> With joyning your each soul to soul. (*P,* 77)

Lord Singularity hastens the vows ('Come, come, dispatch, dispatch' […] 'Begin, quick, quick' (*P,* 76–77)) for the nuptial bed; it would seem that the marriage will be less of a union of souls and minds, than one of bodies.

Once Affectionata agrees to marriage and the printed playtext reverts her name to Lady Orphant, the conversation between the would-be husband and wife changes significantly. The social distance between them widens, the linguistic formulations used in their dialogues, particularly those voiced by Lady Orphant, change from those of solidarity to those of deference. In the earlier scenes of the play in which, 'as a Father loves a son', the Lord keeps his page, there is a certain level of respect, but also a great deal of affection (*P,* 32). Singularity frequently refers to his page by name, even at times as '*my* Affectionata' or '*my dear* Affectionata' (emphasis mine (*P,* 42 and 72)). Though 'my' suggests a possessive instinct, there is a warmth in his linguistic attempts to draw Affectionata closer: 'My Affectionata, Why walks thou so melancholly?' (*P,* 42). In a similar way, the disguised Lady Orphant frequently addresses her master with

conventionally polite honorifics, 'my Lord'. Moreover, it would seem that her male garb, and the social position it allows, permits her to speak openly, even to confront him verbally:

LORD SINGULARITY Affectionata, You anger me very much.
AFFECTIONATA Indeed my Lord, you grieve me more than I can anger you. (*P,* 45)

In this particular exchange, Affectionata effectively replicates the construction of Singularity's statement, only to invert and undo its contents; such is the delicate balance of their relationship, like the loving deference between father and son. Once they are betrothed, however, the construction of their dialogue changes markedly. In the final scene of the play, the wedding scene, Singularity does not address Lady Orphant directly. Though Cavendish informs the reader that the groom looks unblinkingly at his bride, there is no suggestion that he engages with her verbally. In return, the loquacious candour of Affectionata changes – as instantly as her name does – to the reserved meakness of Lady Orphant. She speaks twice in the final scene, both times to offer indirect requests to her groom, which are both prefixed with interjection, 'Pray', a spoken signal of her modest submission.

Lady Orphant's transition from page to wife makes manifest, in a literal sense, the different treatments of men and women according to Cavendish's experience of contemporary culture. She is careful to portray the various dynamics of male/male (Lord Singularity and his 'male' page) and male/female interactions; the differences of which legitimate her impression that marriage, in her plays at least, presents something

of a watershed for female ambition, akin to death. Indeed, Lady Orphant's melancholic verse-making, political strategising and power-mongering are brought to an abrupt end as she relinquishes her masculine disguise. With her female persona unearthed, the Lady's prospects are limited to those of a tractable wife. Thus, Cavendish's plays may well anticipate Schiesari's suggestion that women were written out of the discourse in which melancholia was functionalised as an extraordinary gift, because of their sex. As a male, Affectionata is permitted to voice her melancholia through the medium of poetry, but as a wife, she is effectively silenced, estranged from her previous command of language. The play, and Lady Orphant's narrative therein, ends as she takes her vows. For Sansperielle, too, her ability to access the 'signifying economy' by which men display their genius and ambition proves ultimately fatal. At the same time, however, these plays imply a perspective that Schiesari fails to consider: that these women might, given the same freedom enjoyed by their male counterparts (the freedom Lady Orphant experiences as Affectionata), achieve the same level of success, the '*Cardinals* Cap'.

v. The Lock and the Key: Cavendish's Questionable Domesticity

One might assume that the presentation of marriage in Cavendish's plays reflects her own experience as a wife, stifled in and fettered by the domestic realm. However, Cavendish's own life as both fiercely ambitious creator and dutiful wife placed her in a privileged, if unsettling, position either side of this *peripeteia* of womanhood. Despite her ambition to infiltrate the realm of male-dominated authorship, she maintains her dutiful obedience to Newcastle, who remained her most ardent supporter. She does not

resist marriage like Sanspareille, nor is she quietened by it, like Lady Orphant. Indeed, her tombstone in Westminster Abbey (commissioned by Newcastle, who died three years after Cavendish in 1676) defines her character as both a 'wise wittie & learned Lady' *and* a 'most Virtuous & a Loveing & carefull wife'.[39] In her own life, then, marriage and learning are compatible in a woman, if not in *all* women. One must therefore navigate the inconsistencies presented in her work. In the prefatory material to her *Playes*, Cavendish credits Newcastle with the conflating of genders necessary to permit her venture into publishing: 'My Lord was pleased to illustrate my Playes with some Scenes of his own Wit, to which I have set his name […] my Lord's the masculine, mine the Feminine wit', she writes (*P,* sig. A6r). He 'supplies the defect of [her] Braine with the superfluity' of his own; their marriage is a collaboration, one of 'Souls, Bodies, and Brains' that emboldens, rather than confines, her ambition (*P,* sig. A6r). The idea was taken up by the clergymen, Clement Ellis, who submitted the following verse to a commemorative volume on the Duchess published shortly after her death: 'She's Dead, and here she lies'; his epitaph begins. By the closing lines, Ellis shifts his focus to her widower;

> Seeing in him, and him alone, we find
> Whatever she of Wit hath left behind. […]
> Wit was *Hermaphrodite*, when One in Twain;

[39] 'William & Margaret Cavendish', *Westminster Abbey* < https://www.westminster–abbey.org/abbey– commemorations/commemorations/william– margaret– cavendish> [accessed June 2019].

But now 'tis only *Masculine* again.[40]

Ellis' poem takes up Cavendish's own presentation of her marriage's exclusive gender hierarchy. Her recognition of her husband's contribution, reinforced by the clergyman, could look to assuage those who labelled her as a shameful strumpet, just as much as it could seek to preserve his reputation. Indeed, Newcastle's own writing career remained in his wife's shadow, eclipsed by her notoriety. His play, *The Humourous Lovers* (1667), though published anonymously, was assumed to be the work of Cavendish and thus deemed 'the most silly thing that ever came upon a stage' by her most vocal critic, Samuel Pepys.[41]

That her marriage to Newcastle accounted for a good deal, if not most, of her wit runs counter to her recurrent claims to singularity and her intolerance of the role that her society had allowed her (and her heroines). Moreover, that Newcastle not only tolerated, but encouraged, Cavendish's work troubled their peers, who feared for the dynamics of their marriage. In a particularly vitriolic remembrance, John Stansby (1629 – 1680) links Cavendish's ambition to godless anarchy and licentiousness: she is 'Shame of her sex, Welbeck's illustrious whore […] That owns no God, no devil, lord or master'.[42]

[40] *Letters and Poems in Honour of the Incomparable Princess, Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle* (London, 1676), p. 177.

[41] Samuel Pepys, Robert Latham and William Matthews, eds., *The Diary of Samuel Pepys,* Volume 8 (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), p. 137.

[42] Quoted in Douglas Grant, *Margaret the First,* p. 199. Grant quotes from the original epitaph (undated) written on Cavendish's death (Bodleian Ashmole MS 36, fol. 186). Whitaker argues that Stansby (she refers to him as 'Stainsby') may not have written the verse, but collected it on his travels (*Mad Madge*, p. 348).

For Stansby, the implicit remedy to Cavendish's erroneous ways is her need to be disciplined in obedience, to both God and her 'master', Newcastle. Indeed, in July 1671, Welbeck's senior servant, John Booth, recorded his 'true narative and Confession of that horrid Consperacie; against her Grace Margaret Duchess of Newcastle acted at Welbeck, October the 31st last past, by Andrew Clayton, Francis Liddell, and John Booth and now confessed by the said John Booth, to the said Duke of Newcastle and to her Grace the Duchess as followeth'.[43] The 'confession', now held at the University of Nottingham archives, consists of six folios filled with Booth's secretary hand and details a libel upon Cavendish that presents an altogether different view of her as a wife from the perspective of those that lived alongside her and her husband.[44]

Together with Clayton, Newcastle's steward, and Liddell, the house ward, Booth wrote an anonymous letter, which they surreptitiously delivered to the Duke, accusing his wife of machinations tantamount to adultery. The comptroller details the financial catalyst for the smear. Liddell had pressed Clayton to repay a bond of £500 owed to his father, the late Sir Thomas Liddell. In return for three horses, including a prized 'colt foale', Clayton had also promised to reduce Liddell's rent for the desmesne of Ogle by £30 a year.[45] By October 1670, however, Clayton admitted that 'the Duchess did so

[43] 'Confession touching a conspiracy against Margaret [Cavendish nee Lucas], Duchess of Newcastle; 1 Jul. 1671', University of Nottingham., Portland Manuscripts MSS Pw 315– 317.

[44] Prior to this study, this confession is discussed in Sarasohn's work, *God and Nature in the Thought of Margaret Cavendish* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 19, but focuses rather on the accusations of adultery from a religious angle.

[45] 'Confession', fol. 1r. Folios 1– 5 form the first copy of Booth's confession, and folios 6– 10, the second. Both are dated to 1st July 1671, but are written in different hands. Where the writing on the first copy is illegible, I have referred to the second copy for clarification.

narrowly of late inspect his Graces' affaires, as that he could make no alteration of the Rental without being discovered: and he also found that she posatively obstructed his Grace for paying of that £500 debt'.[46] Cavendish had rather enlisted the help of a 'Mr Rolston' to 'drawe up new and perfect Rentals of all his Graces Revennue and […] Lett the whole Estate' which, the men suspected, would permit her to 'break up the famelie and goe to Rant at London'.[47] Booth continues to depict a woman heavily involved with the estate's financial affairs, so much so that Booth repeats Clayton's belief that Cavendish was siphoning £2000 a year from the estate's 'Grand settlement' in order to fund another life: her 'hole care, and studie', he writes, 'was nothing more than to inrich her selfe for a second husband, well knowing his Grace could not live longe' (Newcastle was thirty years her senior).[48]

Though the accusations made in the libel cannot be verified, and were fiercely denied by the Duchess herself, Booth's confession reveals an altogether different depiction of Cavendish as a wife than that presented in her own work.[49] In these papers, the Duchess is not shut away in her study writing, but actively engaged in Welbeck's

[46] Ibid.

[47] 'Confession', fol. 2r.

[48] Ibid.

[49] It should be noted that Booth maintains his honesty, signing the papers with the following: 'thus did we most wickedly conspire against her Grace and God hath brought it to Light that we may receive shame and punishment all this I humbly and most truly Confesse, having not swarved in the Least from the truth which I will be ready to depose upon my oath in any courte or before any Judicature witness my hand', fol. 6r.

investments.[50] In this aspect, it would seem that she has a great deal of influence; though the libel may have brought a premature end to her re-evaluation of the estate, the content therein suggests that she was liberated enough to seek her own financial advisor in Mr Rolston. Moreover, Clayton divulged to Booth (who then records in the confession) how Cavendish insisted that the '£6000 worth of wood upon the forest of Sherwood belonging to his Grace' must be sold, a request that the Duke 'by one shift or other prevented that for two yeers by past'.[51] The account throws light on the dynamics of the marriage as perceived by other members of the household. Cavendish appears fiercely independent from the Duke, with him at pains to placate her ambitions. Clayton claimed that he was 'often involved in sharpe and passionate quarrels betweene there Graces'.[52] Forced to contradict 'her Graces designes', he became 'more and more discovered and hated' by Cavendish, who immediately identifies him as the libel's co-conspirator when it was uncovered in October 1670.

The depiction of the Duchess in the 'confession' chimes with that of Stansby; her freedoms and power within the household come at the cost of Newcastle's reputation. A parallel case might be the Castlehaven Scandal of 1631 in which Mervin Touchet, the 2nd Earl of Castlehaven, was tried and ultimately executed for sodomising his servants and encouraging one of them to rape his second wife, Anne.[53] As Cynthia Herrup explains,

[50] Further research may trace records relating to this case to those of The King's Bench in The National Archives; one 1671 record from the Court of Chancery – in which Andrew Clayton is the plaintiff and Newcastle the defendant – can be found in The National Archives, C 7/482/ 14.

[51] 'Confession', fol. 2r.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Katsuhiro Engetsu, '*A Mask*: Tradition and Innovation' in Angelica Duran, ed., *A Concise Companion to Milton* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 111– 127 (p. 119).

the Earl's trial was scandalous not only for the accusations of sexual misconduct, but for his gross inability to govern his household.[54] Throughout his trial, the Earl was revealed to be infatuated with his servants, gifting his favourites with substantial sums of money and property, while his wife and stepdaughter, Elizabeth Brydges, were proffered for sexual favours. His actions were a flagrant inversion of the order of the household: 'Castlehaven had humiliated those whom he was to protect, indulged those whom he was to restrain'.[55] The Earl's behaviour threatened to dishonour the image of the male as the head of the household. However, the case is unusual for the Earl's submitting to his servants, not to his wife. Indeed, Laura Gowing suggests that the responsibility for the maintenance of household dynamics 'rest[ed] in practice upon women: only women's sexual misconduct damag[ed] the household honour'.[56] Cavendish's conduct, as it is reported by the servants, is perhaps more typical of that deemed to render her husband a 'wittol'; her strength is interpreted as his weakness.[57]

Booth records Clayton's claim that 'it was her Graces delight to ruine all persons that she had to doe with and that he heard her Grace say the old Countess of Shrosbury (Bess of Hardwick, Newcastle's grandmother) practised the same'.[58] The Duchess is depicted as a Machiavellian wielder, obsessed with the power and influence afforded by

[54] Cynthia Herrup, *A House of Gross Disorder: Sex, Law, and the 2nd Earl of Castlehaven* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 73– 7.

[55] Cynthia Herrup, *A House of Gross Disorder*, p. 75.

[56] Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 106.

[57] 'wittol, *n.* (1. a.) 'A man who is aware of and complaisant about the infidelity of his wife; a contented cuckhold' <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/229753> [accessed June 2019].

[58] 'Confession', fol. 7r.

her position. She continued, Booth relays, to suggest that 'she was a Duchess and Consequently, a greater person then a Countess' and so more effective in her ability to 'ruine' her antagonists.[59] Newcastle's servants therefore plot to have their letter find its way to Welbeck and the Duke,

> to mind his Grace of that great honor; and esteem, the world hath for him, before the late Rebellion; and that now he went much lesse in the opinions of all, the cause whereof right or wrong we were to cast upon her Grace.[60]

It is interesting that Booth, recording the content of this letter in his confession 10 months later, should choose to highlight the Duke's seemingly tarnished honour; the statement intends to not only blacken Cavendish's name for posterity, but to strike at his master's pride and reputation. Though the servants' motivation was most likely financial (so Liddell may be recompensed for the unpaid bond; Clayton, 'weary of his imployment', to secure his position; and, Booth to regain some relative control of the household expenditures, away from the Duchess' prying eyes), they go further to slander both Graces and encourage them to 'parte house'.[61] Their dislike of Cavendish was evidently profound and personal; in separating Cavendish from Newcastle, the servants hoped to restore some sense of equity to Welbeck, so the Duke 'should be in a Capacite to serve Every one according to there merit and desire'.[62] Though, Newcastle initially

[59] Ibid.

[60] 'Confession', fol. 3r.

[61] 'Confession', fol. 2r.

[62] 'Confession', fol. 2r.

suspects that the 'Parson of Mansfield' was responsible for the letter, it is rather Cavendish who initiates the search for the true culprits which led to Booth's confession.[63] He was ultimately exposed, and the libel quashed at the King's Bench where Clayton – the primary source of much of the slanderous information – was denied his grant of stewardship, while Booth and Liddell served only as witnesses. Ultimately, then, Cavendish did 'ruine' him.

According to the three men, the Duke's authority, honour and esteem could only be restored if his wife was to leave the family. Her fierce ambition evidently bled into her command of the household. In a letter to the Earl of Danby, Newcastle's son, Henry, later wrote that he was 'very melancholy, finding my Father more persuaded by his wife than I could thinke it possible'.[64] Just prior to this letter, and the discovery of the libel, one anonymous poet joined Stansby in making the dynamics of the Newcastle's marriage public, placing the onus entirely on the Duke for his wife's defiance. The poem, 'The Session of the Poets', reads,

XXIII

Newcastle and's Horse for entrance next strives,
Well stuff'd was his Cloakbag, and so was his Breeches
And unbutt'ning the place where Nature's posset-maker lives,
Pull'd out his Wife's Poems, Plays, Essays and Speeches.

[63] 'Confession', fol. 10r.

[64] A. S. Turberville, *A History of Welbeck Abbey and its Owners: 1539–1755,* vol. 1 (London, 1938), pp. 207–8.

XXIV

Whoop, quoth Apollo, what a Devil have we here,
Put up thy Wife's Trumpery, good noble Marquis,
And home again, home again take thy Career,
To provide her fresh Straw, and a Chamber that dark is.[65]

Cavendish's ability is imagined only in terms of her husband's sexual impotency. Here, her status as poet literally emasculates him; her work fills the place where his 'posset-maker' should be. The reference mocks Cavendish's own use of 'posset' in 'A *Posset* for Natures Breakfast', where the creation of human life is 'similized' with cooking and eating in Nature's kitchen (*PF,* 128). More telling, however, is that Newcastle appears to surrender his manhood for the sake of his wife's 'Trumpery', a term that not only referred to worthless nonsense, but, by this time, carried connotations of affectation and deceit.[66] For her readers, then, her flagrant written defiance of marriage, or rather the position it afforded her as a wife, outweighed any suggestion of her willing submission to Newcastle. Both husband and wife are denied Apollo's recognition – 'home again, home again thy Career', he chides – presumably for their warping of contemporary

[65] *Poems on Affairs of State: From the Time of Oliver Cromwell to the Abdication of King James the Second* (1697), p. 299. In the copy– text, held at the Bodleian Library, this particular poem is dated 1666, but as editor of the 1963 edition, George deF. Lord suggests, allusions to later events (like Thomas Shadwell's first play, *The Sullen Lovers*) would suggest a more likely date of 1668: George deF. Lord, *Poems on Affairs of State: Augustan Satirical Verse 1660– 1714*, Volume 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 327.
[66] 'trumpery', *n*. and *adj*. (A.1.) 'Deceit, fraud, imposture, trickery. *Obselete*' < http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/206935 > [accessed January 2019].

gender codes, which render Newcastle, a disgraced eunuch, and Cavendish, a monstrous pseudo-male.

Such emphatic responses to her work, and her lifestyle, were not atypical. More often, however, her attempts to overcome the boundaries to change were met with remarks that sought to reinstate the demarcations of gender. A rich source for such responses is the collection of letters Cavendish received in thanks for gifting copies of her work to the prestigious libraries of Oxford and Cambridge. The many letters of receipt were gathered, along with dedicatory poems, in a commemorative volume, *Letters and Poems in Honour of the Incomparable Princess*, first published after her death in 1676. Though the provenance of this text will be discussed further in chapter seven, for now, this section will consider a particular letter from the Master of St John's College, Cambridge, where Newcastle once studied. Though this letter is one of the few not to bear a date, the preceding and following letter in the volume are dated to 1663 and 1667, respectively. This would make the Master of the college Peter Gunning (1614 – 1684), who took the position in June 1661.

Gunning's letter is, at times, almost sycophantic in its thanks for Cavendish's generous gift: 'in your poems we admire that Life and Spirit, as also that Native, and Even fancie, which, every where, is Conspicuous'.[67] However, he is clear to establish a division between the textual pursuits of men and women, which is most likely informed by his Anglican faith, holding positions as the Bishop of Chichester and as a canon of

[67] *Letters and Poems,* p. 19.

Canterbury Cathedral. In her philosophy, he writes, 'All is plain and genuine, meer and natural Nature', implying the traditional connection between femininity and the natural world. By contrast, 'We men', he continues, 'find Nature and Truth very coy and sullen… But she willingly shews herself all bare and naked to your Grace'.[68] Cavendish and Nature, here imagined as a woman, are linked in their self-sufficiency; both create from within themselves – Nature 'doth freely open and unbowel her self' to Cavendish.[69] Indeed, later in the volume, another letter develops the analogy that Cavendish embraced in her own writing: her wit is evidenced in her ability to 'spin out of one's own Bowels, not Cobwebs as Spiders so, but rich Tissues of Gold and Silver'.[70] This connection between Nature and Cavendish was, as Gunning writes, suspicious to those men who, by their gender, could not achieve the same propinquity to the natural world. For them, the simultaneity of Nature's (and, by association, Cavendish's) skill and sex, equate her with 'Ghosts and Goblings, as if she were some Witch, or Sorceress; some offer violence to her, and put her to the rack, and make her rather Lie then Confess'.[71]

Gunning's view makes clear the widely held view that associated women with nature, and men with culture. The reproductive function exclusive to women, childbearing and child rearing in particular, brought women closer to the natural world. They were thus confined to a domestic role, allowing men to pursue the cultural aspects of arts and philosophy. Cavendish herself demonstrated a frustration with – or, as

[68] Ibid.

[69] *Letters and Poems,* p. 5.

[70] *Letters and Poems,* p. 80.

[71] *Letters and Poems,* p. 5.

Mendelson suggests, perhaps a 'guilt' over – what she presumed to be, the irrational responsibility pushed upon women to bear children.[72] Though 'it be part of every Good Wife to desire Children to Keep alive the Memory of their Husbands Name', she maintained that women have no reason to desire children themselves, 'first her Name is lost, […] also her Family, […] Also she Hazards her Life by Bringing them into the World, and hath the greatest share of Trouble in Bringing them up' (*SL,* 183). Of course, Cavendish's view may have been coloured by remorse at her own childlessness, but regardless, the idea chimes with her hermaphroditic blending of male and female personas throughout her oeuvre, particularly when she herself, or her heroines, are confronted with the tenets of forced domesticity. In stepping away from the female prerogative of childbearing and its affiliations with the natural world, she sanctions her own move to the 'cultural' realm of authorship and publication – her books are her children.

The commemorative volume includes three references to Cavendish's 'pregnant' brain, imagination and wit, but one should be cautious to relate this term directly to childbearing. The notion of 'pregnant' wit was, at this time, not exclusive, if seldom attributed, to women. As Stacey Shimizu has shown, the OED peculiarly lists figurative uses of pregnant, referring to inventiveness and imagination, before the literal use, 'with child'; the former deriving from the Old French meaning 'pithie, lively, [or] ripe'.[73] One

[72] Sara Mendelson, *The Mental World of Stuart Women* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), p. 26.

[73] Stacey Shimizu, 'The Pattern of Perfect Womanhood: Feminine Virtue, Pattern Books and the Fiction of the Clothworking Woman' in Barbara Whitehead, ed., *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe: A History, 1500 to 1800* (London: Garland Publishing, 1999), pp. 75– 100 (p. 89).

should therefore be careful to presume that this term is used in reference to Cavendish's sex. It is possible that the contributors to the commemorative volume use this term with a certain irony, a snide reminder of the subject's abandoned womanhood. In fact, in the poems that conclude the text, it is suggested that, typically, women should have 'Fruitful *Wombs*, but Baren Brains'.[74] The Master of Trinity College, Cambridge appears to confirm this, questioning how Cavendish's ability should flourish 'without the help of a Tutor', but more so 'without the Mid wifery of an University'.[75] This less familiar analogy acknowledges the double etymology of 'pregnancy' in the period; it is both a pointed comment on Cavendish's duty as woman and a suggestion that the 'Eloquence, Poetry, Philosophy' she sought to demonstrate in her writing should be rightly borne out in the male domain of a university.[76]

That the wit of the male writer should be delivered (to continue the analogy) with the aid of university education involved a converging of male and female prerogatives that was not effectively applied to the woman writer in the same way. The letters from the masters of each college testify to the feminisation of the pursuit of the male scholar, a pursuit which can be extrapolated to that of the male melancholic genius, given to study and learning. For the learned female, however, there was no alternative. According to Cavendish's contemporaries, this crossing of gender boundaries should not be inverted at the hands of the writing woman, and if it was, as it is in her own work, it was received not with awe, but disdain. Indeed, one might interpret the woman writer's

[74] *Letter and Poems,* p. 166.

[75] *Letter and Poems,* p. 11.

[76] Ibid.

decision to disseminate her work publicly, her entrance into the male-dominated literary marketplace, as initialising a process of 'masculinisation'. Of course, by paradoxically embracing the essence of her womanhood with its impulse for instinctual creation (as discussed in chapter two) as well as assuming and relishing a hermaphroditic persona, Cavendish's stance is problematised.

It is telling, then, that much of the early modern iconography surrounding melancholia, and particularly melancholic genius, features either earthly women or female angels. Perhaps the most celebrated allegorical portrayal of the condition, both during the early modern period and thereafter, is that of the German engraver, Albrecht Dürer. His 'Melencolia I' (1514) depicts a brooding winged woman surrounded by scattered objects. The wreath she wears may resemble the laurel crown, the ancient mark of poetic supremacy, but is in fact made of watercress and water ranunculus, moisture-rich plants used to counteract the dryness caused by melancholy.[77] The confusion is likely purposeful; through the likeness of the laurel leaves and these plants, melancholy and artistic excellence are made one and the same. Around her, the scene is loaded with symbolism: a comet implies the presence of Saturn, while a magic square (a form of talisman) serves to attract the healing influences of Jupiter against Saturnine despair. Yet, if the condition depicted is historically reserved only for men, then, why does Dürer choose a female subject?

[77] Walter, L. Strauss, ed., *The Complete Engravings, Etchings and Drypoints of Albrecht Dürer* (New York: Dover Publications, 2013), p. 168.

Of course, there is a linguistic relevance to the characterisation of melancholy as a woman; like Justice and Wisdom, she takes the feminine form in Latin. Dürer's use of a woman may also signify the melancholic's liminal status; his Melancholia is given wings, a visual cue of the experient's outstanding nature (recognised since the *Problemata*), but is also a woman, the most imperfect and deficient of the two sexes. Like Cavendish's own depiction of genius, then, Dürer's image presents a subject somewhere between the mundane and the miraculous. Despite the otherwise deliberate marginalisation of female sufferers, Dürer's engraving is one of many to exploit the notion of a 'Dame Melancholy' or 'Dame Tristesse' as a reasonable manifestation of the genial condition.[78] In the wake of Dürer, Lucas Cranach (1528 – 33), Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione (1609 – 64), and even Henri-Simon Thomassin in 1729, amongst many others found it fitting to personify melancholy in a woman's body, not as a direct manifestation, but rather to represent the feminisation and/or the liminality of its male experients. The images selected for the frontispieces to Cavendish's own texts convey her awareness of these traditions; in particular, the portraits used to introduce her *Poems and Fancies* (1653) and *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655). The former depicts her in a typically masculine guise, found 'in portraits of kings, aristocrats, and great men', while in the latter, cherubim circle her head carrying the laurel leaves historically used to crown the celebrated male poet.[79] Like Dürer, then, Cavendish's visual representations of

[78] Raymond Klibansky, et al., *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy* (London: Nelson, 1964), p. 221– 3.

[79] This frontispiece, in *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655), is not available on *Early English Books Online,* but is reproduced in Ostovich and Sauer, eds., *Reading Early Modern Women: An Anthology of Texts in Manuscript and Print, 1550– 1700,* p. 80; Whitaker, *Mad Madge,* p. 174.

melancholic genius intend to subvert gender stereotypes and play at the expectations of male and female, though for ultimately polarised reasons.

Cavendish's conscious 'masculinisation' inverts the 'feminisation' that was deemed compulsory in the male's conversion to melancholic, a conversion detailed in Schiesari's study. Schiesari is clear that this process of feminisation is not an 'incontrovertible recognition of symbolic castration' through which the matter of melancholy is democratised and made available to all, but rather a 'totally phallic' appropriation of desirable female inclinations such as sensitivity and passivity, both of which inform the melancholic's contemplative nature.[80] While the feminisation of the melancholic would later gain momentum, culminating in the eighteenth-century fashion for sentimentalism and the 'man of feeling', Cavendish already knew all too well that the masculinisation of the female writer was vilified. In the prefatory material to *Sociable Letters* she alludes to the case of Lady Mary Wroth. After Wroth had published her romance *Urania* in 1621, Lord Edward Denny soon retorted with a malicious written attack, in which he depicted her as 'Hermaphrodite in show, in deed a monster'.[81] Cavendish alludes to Denny's sardonic poem in her preface where his final lines 'Work o th' Workes leave idle books alone/ For wise and worthier women have written none' are reconfigured 'It may be said to me, as one said to a Lady, *Work, Lady, Work, let writing Books alone, For surely Wiser Women ne'r writ one*' (*SL,* sig. B1r). Denny's slurs reverberate in the remainder of her letter in which she defends her lack of interest in

[80] Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia,* p. 31.

[81] Edward Denny, 'To Pamphilia from the Father– in– Law of Seralius' quoted in Mary Ellen Lamb, *Gender and Authorship in the Sidney Circle* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), p. 157.

the conventional 'works' of women: 'Needle-works, spinning-works, preserving-works, as also baking and cooking-works, as making cakes, pies, puddings, and the like, all which I am ignorant of' (*SL,* sig. B1r). She assures her reader instead that she is not 'a dunce in all employments, for I understand the keeping of sheep and ordering of a grange indifferently well' – pursuits that would confirm the libel's presentation of her as more than capable in household management – 'although I do not busy myself much with it by reason my scribbling takes away the most part of my time', she continues (*SL,* sig. B1v).

Just two years earlier, Cavendish had published her bold assumption of the hermaphroditic persona used to denigrate Wroth:

> I know that there are many Scholastical and Pedantical persons that will condemn my writings, because I do not keep strictly to the Masculine and Feminine Genders, as they call them, as for example a Lock and a Key, the one is the Masculine Gender, the other the Feminine Gender, so Love is the Masculine Gender, Hate the Feminine Gender, and the Furies are shees, and the Graces are shees, the Virtues are shees, and the seven deadly Sins are shees, which I am sorry for; but I know no reason but that I may as well makes them Hees for my use, as others did Shees, or Shees as others did Hees (*P,* sig. A5r)

The division of the genders 'doth confound a Scholar more', she suggests, 'than they have time to spend' (*P*, sig. A5r). Her words suppose her intention to invert the gender stereotypes that have previously categorised women as 'Other', as polarised

abstractions like Furies and Graces, Virtues and Sins. In this extract, she not only sanctions her iconoclastic move into publishing, but does so with a bold contention to readdress the supposed 'asymmetry' of textual subjectivity; she will dictate the gender of her subjects, presuming to puppeteer 'Hees' and 'Shees' for her own use.

Both Wroth and Cavendish grapple with an issue that troubled each early modern woman writer, that being how to negotiate 'an asymmetry of male and female subject positions'.[82] As Wendy Wall suggests, 'how could a woman become an author if she was the 'other' against whom 'authors' differentiated themselves?'[83] While men were able to ventriloquise the voices of both genders fluidly, a woman could not adopt the subjectivity of 'the male-authored discourse' without compromising 'her social standing'.[84] Indeed, Wroth had attempted to assuage criticism by generating speculation as to how the text came to press: copies 'were solde against my minde I never purposing to have had them published', she writes.[85] It is more than likely, however that Wroth 'wished for [its publication] to seem accidental or beyond her control' in order to recover her modesty.[86] On the other hand, Cavendish's modus operandi, as it is described in the extract above, relies on the hermaphroditic doubleness of the authorial voice. She relishes her opportunity, with Newcastle's blessing, to cross gender

[82] Danielle Clarke, *The Politics of Early Modern Women's Writing* (London, Routledge, 2013), p. 191.
[83] Wall, *Imprint of Gender*, p. 282.
[84] Danielle Clarke, *The Politics of Early Modern Women's Writing,* p. 191.
[85] Taken from a letter Wroth wrote to George Villiers, the first Duke of Buckingham, written 15th December 1621 (Bodleian Library, MS Add. D. 111, fol. 173) and quoted in Mary Wroth, *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth*, ed. by Josephine Roberts (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), p. 236.
[86] Mary Ellen Lamb, ed., *The Countess of Montgomery's* Urania *by Lady Mary Wroth (Abridged)* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2011), p. 6.

boundaries and assume the uncomfortable position of pseudo-male. As has been demonstrated in this chapter, Cavendish emphatically subverts the tenets of a misogynist melancholy, as it is later codified in Schiesari's formula. Not only does she aspire to the inherently male 'gran folia', but she does so by assuming and manipulating traditionally masculine ideas concerning natural philosophy and science and, beyond her writing, in her choreographed displays of hermaphroditism – wearing a cavalier's garb and preferring to bow than to curtsy. In doing so, she attempts to sublimate the primacy of the male narrative and with it, the ability to vocalise and legitimate its access to the genial melancholy tradition. Her repeated visits to the subject, both in her fictional and autobiographical discourses, threatened to force open an ever-widening fissure in the foundations of male-dominated *auctoritas*.

Chapter Seven

Worms and Comets: The Struggle of the Learned Woman

i. Convents and Academies: The Duality of Learnedness

One of the primary ways in which Cavendish challenges male authority is through her depiction of the learned female and, more pertinently, a female academy of learning, a concept dramatically opposed to the male equivalent that featured in early modern literature. In Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* (c. 1595–6), the intellectual superiority of the male elite is dramatically safeguarded with the promise of an all-male academy, or 'academe'.[1] At the King of Navarre's behest, the college would be a place for its members to learn and study, them having sworn an oath 'Not to see ladies, study fast, not sleep'.[2] This male retreat, in the style of Plato's Academy, allowed these men to withdraw from society as to be untroubled by sexual desire; they would stoically 'war against [their] own affections/ And the huge army of the world's desires' for the pursuit of knowledge.[3] Ultimately, the rigours of King Ferdinand's plans prove too much for his would-be participants. Regardless, Shakespeare had tapped into a contemporary fashion for clandestine coteries, in which learned men would gather to exchange ideas. A prominent example is 'The School of Night', originally referred to as 'The School of

1 William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works of Shakespeare,* ed. by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), *Love's Labours Lost,* 1, 1. 13, p. 309.

2 *Love's Labours Lost,* 1, 1. 48, p. 310.

3 *Love's Labours Lost,* 1, 1. 9– 10, p. 309.

Atheism', to which Sir Walter Ralegh, George Chapman and Christopher Marlowe were thought to belong.[4] Though women, given their lack of formal education, would not be expected to attend these or similar meetings, the opening of Shakespeare's play reinforces the gender division: women are made 'Other'. They are a distraction to be dealt with; their inability to access education is no longer presumed by tradition but is also enforced by a physical partition.

Though the academy in *Love's Labours Lost* fails, the idea resonated with Cavendish who, despite her unwillingness to admit her sources, was open about her reading of Shakespeare.[5] It is reasonable, then, that she would have read the comedy, especially when one considers its appropriation in her own play, *The Convent of Pleasure*. The play's heiress, Lady Happy sets about to create an all-female academy, which 'shall not be a Cloister of restraint, but a place for freedom, not to vex the Senses but to please them' (*P,* 7). The Shakespearian 'academe' is turned on its head as Cavendish entertains the ideal of a cloistered paradise without men for the benefit of female learning. Like the She-Anchoret, Lady Happy chooses to retire herself to the convent, 'since there is so much folly, vanity, and falsehood in Men, why should Women trouble and vex themselves for their sake; for retiredness bars the life from nothing else but Men' (*P,* 4). The convent she creates bears great similarity to the depiction of paradise in Cavendish's *Orations* (1662): there will be 'Pictures rare', 'perfumed Air',

[4] Frances Amelia Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age,* Volume 7 (London: Routledge, 1979), p. 150– 1.

[5] Katherine Romack and James Fitzmaurice, 'Introduction: Cavendish and Shakespeare, Interconnections' in Romack and Fitzmaurice, *Cavendish and Shakespeare,* p. 2.

'melodious Sound' and 'sweet delicious Meat', but most importantly, it makes manifest a proto-feminist fantasy of life without 'the only troublers of Women', men (*P,* 7).

Of course, in order to ensure their freedom and reinforce their division from men, Cavendish's heroine, like Sanspareille and Affectionata, takes up the argument against marriage. Lady Happy's decision to enter the academy and pursue learning means that she forfeits the prospect of married life; marriage and learning are, once more, presented as polarities in an either/or scenario. Indeed, Cavendish develops an innovative play-within-a-play structure in which the inhabitants of the convent watch an admonitory performance on the dangers of marriage. Regardless of their social status, 'Cobler's Wife' or 'Ladie', marriage proves a curse to all of 'Women kind':[6]

> Marriage is a Curse we find,
> Especially to Women kind:
> From the Cobler's Wife we see,
> To Ladies, they unhappie be. (*P*, 30)

Eschewing the quarantine of marriage, the group of twenty women ultimately divide themselves into couples of one female and one pseudo-male member. They *enact* the

[6] Earlier in the play, the cobbler's wife had been comforted 'for the loss of her husband who is run away with Goody Mettle, the tinker's wife' (*P,* 24). Here, 'Goody' or 'goodwife' is a title given to a married woman of low social standing, while 'mettle' – punning on 'metal' – carries sexual connotations of energy and vitality ('goody', *n.* (1.a.) *Oxford English Dictionary*, *OED* < https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/79992> [accessed June 2019]; 'mettle', *n.* and *adj.* (2. a. and b.) *OED* <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/117727> [accessed June 2019]).

structure of heterosexual marriage, whilst allowing for the gender fluidity (including the hermaphroditism and cross-dressing) that Cavendish saw as so essential to female freedom of thought.

As with each of Cavendish's plays discussed hitherto, *The Convent of Pleasure* (published as part of her 1668 volume of *Plays*) concludes with an almost inevitable reversal of circumstances for the women concerned. Indeed, Lady Happy's pseudo-male partner, the Princess, reveals herself to be a he, the Prince, who immediately sets about authenticating their previously fictitious marriage in the real world. The play presents what is, perhaps, the most efficacious example of transvestism in Cavendish's dramatic canon. Here, women do not play at being men, but rather a man must pretend to be a woman after his own sex is found wanting. However, in previous instances of crossing-dressing – including Lady Orphant in *Loves Adventures* and Miseria from the allegorical romance, *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* – the true identity of these women, apart from their male personas, is known to the reader from the beginning of the play. Conversely, the Prince goes unidentified until (s)he unveils himself. For Cavendish's female reader and for the members of her fictional convent, the Prince's convincing disguise is particularly unsettling. The female inhabitants' pretensions to an all-female utopia are infiltrated, disturbed and undone from within. Having violated their space, the intruder sets about dismantling the convent, dividing the women into 'Virgins and Widows' (*P,* 52); the women are organised according to their relation to male suitors.

Lady Happy is permitted no response to either affront; she is helpless in the face of resurgent patriarchy. Rather, the closing words are given to Mimick, the fool:

> […] I dare not beg Applause, our Poetess then
> Will be enrag'd, and kill me with her Pen;
> For she is careless, and is void of fear;
> If you dislike her Play she doth not care. (*P,* 53)

The speech has a meta-fictive ring; the epilogue brings an end to the convent and the literature produced by the women therein. The idyllic seclusion of the cloister is lost as the convent is reimagined through the male gaze as a source of a more sensual pleasure, much like a harem: the two equal parts will serve as 'one for Fools, and th' other for Married Men, as mad Men' (*P,* 51). Though Cavendish's convent may come to a premature end, the idea of an all-female academy was taken up by many women in her wake, namely, Mary Astell, who proposes a similar idea in *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694):

> Happy Retreat! which will be the introducing you into such a *Paradise* as your Mother *Eve* forfeited, where you shall feast on Pleasures, that do not, like those of the World, disappoint your expectations, pall your Appetites, and by the disgust they give you put on the fruitless search after new Delights, which when obtain'd are as empty as the former; but such as will make you *truly* happy *now*, and prepare you to be *perfectly* so hereafter. Here are no Serpents to deceive you, whilst you entertain your selves in these delicious Gardens.[7]

[7] Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the advancement of their true and greatest interest by a lover of her sex* (London, 1694), p. 67.

Astell reimagines the Platonic academy, and specifically the garden or grove in which he tutored, as the Garden of Eden. The '*Paradise*' may even offer an alternative to marriage, and yet, much like Cavendish's work, Astell's text is underpinned with a conservative belief in the sacrament: in referring to Eve, the suggestion of subservience to a male is never far away. Regardless, Astell still encourages Eve's self-improvement not only for her(self), but that she may better serve others. Both Cavendish and Astell advocate a certain degree of flexibility *within,* not necessarily apart from, marriage to make room for a woman to be a scholar and a wife.

The notion of a female academy had to strive against a well-established view of gender hierarchy propounded by wider contemporary culture; for many, this understanding of gender difference rested on polarised interpretations of the Book of Genesis. That Eve was made of Adam's rib was proof enough that women were inferior to men. Though an opposing argument held that men were inferior as they were made of dirt not flesh, it did little to overcome the belief that women were twice removed from the Creator, made in the image of man, who, in turn, was the image of God.[8] For the early modern woman, subordination was a legacy of the Fall, a punishment for Eve's sin. Many seventeenth-century poetesses, however, found inspiration in an altogether different figure: the ancient Greek poet, Sappho. Credited as the original icon of female poets in the work of Aristotle (*The Art of Rhetoric*), Boccaccio (*De mulieribus claris* (1374)) and Christine de Pisan (*City of Ladies* (1405)), Sappho's reputation was far-reaching, but

[8] Gowing, *Common Bodies,* p. 7.

blighted by a troubling duality. The rediscovery of her work during the Renaissance – Harriette Andreadis details the preservation of two poems and various fragments that were eventually published by the French printer Henri Estienne, in 1566 – resurrected her reputation as the iconic first female poet.[9] Before the publication of her poetry in London in 1695, then, seventeenth-century readers were thus able to acquire French translations of her surviving work. Her name and its associated epithets were readily taken up by early modern women writers and their commentators: Katherine Philips was dubbed 'the English Sappho' and Anne Bradstreet assumed the role of 'The Tenth Muse', the name Plato gave to Sappho, in her eponymous poetry collection published in 1650.[10] By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the legend of Sappho was firmly rooted in the consciousness of learned women; however, as Andreadis continues, there remained some unease about her 'reputedly transgressive sexuality'.[11]

Along with her learnedness, then, Sappho was also known for her associations with same-sex relationships and tribadism. And tribadism, in turn, threatened the very foundations of heterosexual partnerships by effectively eliminating men. Indeed, Cavendish's *The Convent of Pleasure* has attracted attention for its provocative homoerotic, or 'sapphic', elements, from which men are debarred.[12] As Thomas Laqueur has demonstrated, it was not until the eighteenth century that the 'one-sex model',

[9] Harriette Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same– Sex Literary Erotics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 37– 8.

[10] Katherine Philips, *Poems By the Most Deservedly Admired Mrs. Katherine Philips, the Matchless Orinda* (London, 1667), sig. A2v.

[11] Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England,* p. 39.

[12] For more, see Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 180.

which held that a female was a transposal of a male, their genitalia the inverse of one another, was overturned.[13] In the seventeenth century, then, the tribade assumes the male role in the sex act: she is a pseudo-male.[14] The apologia of the learned woman was therefore complicated by the divisive depiction of women like Sappho as a supposed 'archetype'.[15] Indeed, 'manlike Sappho [had] doubled the sin of Eve, transgressing against her sex as well as the divine command'.[16] The early modern female poetess had adopted an archetype who, by all accounts, was a displaced woman, similar to the castrated, emasculated male.[17] Sappho was a monstrous disfigurement of, and pretender to, the male sex – she, and the women she represented, proved a social and political hazard.

In the spirit of Sappho, the learned woman threatened to upend the 'natural' subordination of women confirmed in Genesis, sustained by the order of the household and institutionalised by the education system. The former perpetuated the necessity of marriage, which placed the male at the centre – he must command, and his wife must obey. The views of educationalist Richard Mulcaster (1531– 1611), High Master of St Paul's School, writing and teaching at the same time that Shakespeare's play was

[13] Cited in Wendy Churchill, *'The Medical Practice of the Sexed Body: Women, Men and Disease in Britain, c. 1600–1740', Social History of Medicine,* 18 (2005), pp. 3–22 (p. 3).

[14] Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England,* p. 4.

[15] Andreadis discusses Cavendish's broaching of same–sex relationships and tribadism in her work in *Sappho in Early Modern England,* p. 184.

[16] Lawrence Lipking, *Abandoned Women and Poetic Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 91.

[17] Carol Pal asserts that 'from Boccaccio onward, learned women were celebrated in terms that emphasised their strangeness', *Republic of Women: Rethinking the Republic of Letters in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 181.

published, exemplify the latter. Though he generally approved of women's education, Mulcaster suggests that this should be limited to suit 'their ends', as the 'principal pillars in the upholding of households'.[18] Mulcaster argued that women should read, but only within the bounds of their domesticity and their faith. As a headmaster, his words carry the full force of the system he represents, in which the dichotomies of private and public, domestic and business, woman and man, are entrenched (and, in *Love's Labours Lost,* made real) and would remain so throughout the centuries to follow. According to Mulcaster, the female mind could only flourish within the limits of this narrow space; it was therefore futile for women to attend university:

> their brains be not so much charged, neither with weight nor with multitude of matters, as boys' heads be, and therefore like empty casks, they make the greater noise.[19]

Though steeped in the ideological bias of his day, Mulcaster's words still register an anxiety that women make 'the greater noise'. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the scepticism surrounding women's education also reached the royal courts in early seventeenth-century England. Having refused to allow his daughter to learn Latin, James I said that women were 'naturally addicted to Vanity' rather than learning. [20] Perhaps

[18] Richard Mulcaster, *Positions Wherein Those Primitive Circumstances be Examined, which are Necessarie for the Training Up of Children, Either for the Skill in Their Booke, or Health in Their Bodie* (London, 1581), p. 176.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Quoted in Frances Teague, *Bathsua Makin: Woman of Learning* (London: Bucknell University Press, 1998), p. 43.

more tellingly, though, he betrays an unease that 'to make women learned and foxes tame had the same effect: to make them more cunning'. [21]

In 1616, King James was reportedly presented with a volume written by a woman who would go on to develop one of the loudest voices in the petition for women's education, Bathsua Makin. One of her contemporaries, John Colet, described her as 'an English rarity, because she could speake and rite pure Latine, Greeke, and Hebrew'.[22] The text, *Musa Virginea,* included poetry written in seven languages, both classical and modern, which Makin dedicated to the King at the age of sixteen. On the final page of this text, now held at the British Library, the printed 'Finis' is prefixed with a handwritten inscription, 'Regis Laus Nescia' ('praise for the King is limitless'), an indication of its royal dedicatee.[23] A similar message – 'Principis Caroli laud NESCIA [finis]/ Et absit omnia fraus' ('The praise of Charles knows no [end] and all deceit is absent') – was inscribed in a later copy of *Musa Virginea* intended for King Charles I.[24] Perhaps unsurprisingly, her gift copy to James I was received with disdain; presented with the text, he reportedly asked 'But can she spin?'[25] Having dared to breach established gender codes, Makin is confronted with her seemingly abandoned domesticity. The

[21] Ibid.

[22] Pal, *Republic of Women,* p. 181.

[23] Anne Leslie Saunders, 'Bathsua Makin (1600 –1675?)' in Laurie J. Churchill et al., eds., *Women Writing Latin: Early Modern Women Writing Latin* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 247 –270 (p 255).

[24] Jane Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets: Language, Gender, and Authority, from Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 378.

[25] Quoted in Teague*, Bathsua Makin*, p. 43. This quotation is originally found in *The Commonplace Book of John Collet 1633,* p. 129 and is otherwise quoted in William J. Thoms, ed., *Anecdotes and Traditions Illustrative of Early English History and Literature* (London: Camden Society, 1839), p. 125.

King's words present her learning as a lack, a want of femininity, rather than a supplement or advantage.

At the close of the century, the French philosopher Jean de la Bruyère (1645 – 1696) registered a contemporary mood that had little changed. A similar pattern is repeated in Bruyère's work; the very suggestion that a woman could have access to knowledge and, because of that, harbour some degree of power is met with a supercilious retracing of the gender division:

> A Woman with Learning, we look on, as we do on a fine Gun, the workmanship of it is rare, 'tis engrav'd most curiously, and kept wonderfully bright, but then 'tis only fit to adorn a Closet, to be shown them who admire such things. 'Tis of no more use or service, either for the Camp, or for hunting than a Manag'd Horse, let him be never so well taught.[26]

Bruyère's words, originally published in Paris in his native tongue in 1687, prove that the *querelle des femmes* also gained traction on the continent, where Cavendish spent over a decade in exile. Indeed, Bruyère's work – a pastiche on the pseudo-Theophrastan text *Characters* – was translated 'by several hands' and published in London in 1699 (and again in 1700, 1702, 1708, 1709 and 1713), from which the translated extract above is derived. As the text's reissuing proves, its content was readily taken up by

[26] Jean de la Bruyère, *The Characters, or, The Manners of the Age by Monsieur de la Bruyere… made English by Several Hands ; With the Characters of Theophrastus, translated from the Greek, and a Prefatory Discourse to Them, by Monsieur de la Bruyere* (London, 1699), p. 68–9.

Englishmen and has since been cited as a major influence for the character sketches of Addison and Steele.[27] In the quotation, Bruyère's words amass the many interpretations of the learned woman; bringing together beauty and violence in the image of the 'fine gun', he implies that these women are something of an oxymoron and, in the same metaphor, registers their potential threat to life, both social and political. In what follows, he attempts to restore the breached lines of division between men and women. His reiteration of woman's subservience is threefold as he tightens the parameters of female prerogative: she is a novelty, an ineffectual ornament, and a pretender to public life, 'no more use or service, either for the Camp, or for hunting', the conventional concerns of the male.

What did those women who petitioned for access to education do to overturn the status quo? Though Cavendish's method of publishing her boldly eccentric philosophy may have been unusual for her day, she was certainly not alone. Makin fulfilled the conventional role of wife and mother and maintained academic correspondence with the learned men and women of her day, such as Carew Ralegh, son of Sir Walter Ralegh, and Anna Maria van Schurman.[28] She ultimately distinguished herself as tutor to Princess Elizabeth, daughter of Charles I, and, during the Interregnum, to a noble family, the Hastings.[29] Her employment as royal tutor indicates her reputation as scholar and

[27] Theresa Braunschneider, *Our Coquettes: Capacious Desire in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), p. 29.

[28] Churchill, *Women Writing Latin: Early Modern Women Writing Latin*, p. 255.

[29] Sarah Gwyneth Ross, *The Birth of Feminism: Woman as Intellect in Renaissance Italy and England* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 240; James' daughter, later Queen Elizabeth of Bohemia (1596– 1662), was educated in the care of Lord Harrington at Coombe Abbey near Coventry. Rather than book– learning, the young Elizabeth was taught to ride, dance and play musical

teacher, a career which culminated in the publication of her own essay petitioning for the education of women, *To Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen, in Religion, Manners, Arts & Tongues, with an Answer to the Objections against this Way of Education*. In this treatise, published in the year of Cavendish's death, 1673, Makin writes of the 'Barbarous custom', which presumed that women were not 'endued with such Reason, as Men'.[30] Cavendish herself anticipated the idea that the intellectual subordination of women is 'an ill custom […], which Men will not willingly suffer to be broken'; she suggests that women had grown accustomed to their subservience and were thus blinded to their intellectual potential.[31] Men, she continues,

> [think] it impossible we should have either learning or understanding, wit or judgement, as if we had not rational souls as well as men, and we out of a custom of dejectednesse think so too, which makes us quit all industry towards profitable knowledge being imployed onely in [low], and pettie imployments. (*PPO,* sig. B3v)

Though men and women have similar, if not equal, capacities to learn, 'the despisements of the masculine sex to the effeminate' deny women the opportunity to fulfil them; they

instruments in preparation for her time at court. Interestingly, she would go on to ensure that her own daughters were educated in Latin, mathematics and philosophy (Aysha Pollnitz, *Princely Education in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p.218). Her eldest daughter, Elizabeth von der Pfalz (1618– 90) was known to correspond with Descartes and Anna von Schurman (Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets*, p. 343).

[30] Makin, 'To Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen', p. 3.

[31] Makin, 'To Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen', p. 5.

'become like worms that onely live in the dull earth of ignorance' of a less than natural gender hierarchy (*PPO,* sig. B2v).

Makin concurred that 'A Learned Woman is thought to be a Comet, that bodes Mischief, when ever it appears'.[32] The learned woman's pursuit of recognition threatened to 'deface the Image of God in Man, it will make Women so high, and Men so low' that it could 'set the whole world in a Flame'.[33] Amongst many women she credits for their eminence 'in Arts and Tongues' and their challenge to this hierarchy, she includes Cavendish, 'the present Dutchess of New-Castle, by her own Genius, rather than any timely Instruction, over-tops many grave Gown-Men'.[34] Makin credits Cavendish with the ability to transcend her own lack of formal education. The nature of her singular subjectivity is made evident; her genius is her 'own'. Yet, in her first text, Cavendish offered a trajectory by which this ability was deemed 'mad' by her male peers:

> That Women writing seldom, makes it strange and unusual […] What is Unusual, Seems Fantastical; and what is Fantastical, seems Odd; and what is Odd, seems Ridiculous. (*PF,* 121)

It seems that Makin, too, was aware of this predicament; her argument for the recognition of women's potential is undermined by the construction of her essay itself.

[32] Makin, 'To Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen', p. 3.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Makin, 'To Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen', p. 10.

The text was first published anonymously which, as discussed in chapter two, was not unusual, but more unusual is that Makin assumes a male persona. She suggests that a renewed programme of education for women would encourage men to improve themselves in order to maintain their superiority, '*To propose Women rivals with us to Learning, will make us court* Minerva *more heartily, lest they should be more in Her Favour'*.[35] And she qualifies her point, '*I am a Man my self, that would not suggest a thing prejudicial to our Sex'*.[36] Both Teague and Elaine Hobby suggest that Makin's masculine persona is consistent with the gender codes of the age: 'how could a woman argue for female worth without appearing immodest?'[37] However, I would suggest that this guise betrays, more than feigned immodesty, an anxiety about her sexual identity that complicates the ideology she proposes – she endeavours to celebrate learned women, while simultaneously concealing her inclusion in the esteemed group. Like much of Cavendish's work, then, Makin, too, engages with the 'struggle for discursive authority'. Despite her assertion that women are reasonable and therefore as deserving of an education, in order to be appreciated amongst male circles, Makin deems it necessary to conceal her sex from her readers. She is most convincing at the very point in which the presentation of her argument is most vulnerable: though it permits her freedom to explore her ideas, her male persona adds credence to the seemingly impenetrable patriarchy of institutionalised learning. The century in which Makin, and Cavendish, lived was therefore book-ended by a patronising suspicion of learned women. The

[35] Makin, 'To Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen', p. 5.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing, 1646– 1688* (London: Virago, 1988), p. 199; also see Teague, *Bathsua Makin*, p. 93.

female scholar was seemingly trapped in a double bind: if she fought her natural urges, limited to vain capriciousness and housewifery, and pretended to learning, she was viewed with suspicion and driven to the fringes with insults emphasising her gross mistake – she would be labelled a lunatic or a whore.

ii. The Myth of 'Mad Madge'

How, then, was Cavendish, and her bold claim for female intelligence, remembered by her contemporaries and successors? Perhaps the most direct evidence can be found in *Letters and Poems in Honour of the Incomparable Princess, Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle*, published in 1676, three years after her sudden passing. The commemorative volume compiles and reproduces correspondence sent to Cavendish throughout her life, often in return for gift copies of her texts, as well as a selection of commemorative poems. The rather flattering title reflects the view of its compiler, William Cavendish, who died in the year of the text's publication, upon which it was renamed *A Collection of Letters and Poems: Written by several persons of Learning, Upon divers Important Subjects, to the late Duke and Duchess* and republished in 1678. It should be noted that, while the title changes, the material inside remains the same. The re-publication of the volume is evidence of Cavendish's continued relevance in the decade that followed her death. However, the titles indicate a dramatic change of perspective: the text is no longer 'in honour of' the Duchess, its amendment emphasises those sending letters *to* Cavendish, rather than Cavendish herself. Newcastle's praise for his wife is displaced by the 'several persons of Learning' who send the letters. Cavendish's name is also

displaced; she is instead identified by her title and, even then, she follows her husband, rather than standing alone. The title of the 1678 text no longer suggests a commemorative volume, but a selection of correspondence on 'divers Important Subjects' for the benefit of its recipients. It suggests that while readers were still intrigued by Cavendish up until the turn of the century, the text was no longer a celebration of her ability to write.

Though Newcastle's volume contains letters of praise, the correspondence offers, more often than not, 'a polite acknowledgement of a gift, rather than an analysis of, or response to, what Cavendish has written'.[38] What few evaluations of her writing are included are hyperbolic in their praise; the Vice Chancellor of Cambridge University is 'stop'd often, because [I] could not but admire, every where, both the loftiness of the argument, and elegancy, and spruceness of the Stile'.[39] Of course, the epideictic nature of the material means one should be careful not to interpret the opinions of the correspondents included at face value. This review seems bizarre, then, given the substantial accounts to the contrary, suggesting Cavendish's lack of 'elegancy' and 'Stile'. That Cavendish's work subverted contemporary conceptions of 'taste' is a criticism that survived the centuries; as James Fitzmaurice maintains: 'the efforts of Cavendish to depict herself as given over to fancy were successful: no-one has ever accused her of slavish attention to meter or limpness of emotion'.[40] Walter Charleton, whose letter

[38] Paul Salzman, *Reading Early Modern Women's Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 156.
[39] *Letters and Poems,* p. 23.
[40] James Fitzmaurice, 'Fancy and the Family: Self– characterisations of Margaret Cavendish', *Huntington Library Quarterly,* 53:3 (1990), pp. 199– 209 (p. 200).

(dated 1667) is also featured in the volume, is more measured than the Vice Chancellor in his recognition of Cavendish's idiosyncratic style:

> For your *POETRY;* therein your Grace hath more than a single advantage above others. *First,* Your Vein appears equally fit for your Muses Legs. Your Phansy is too generous to be restrained: Your Invention too nimble to be fettered. Hence it is, that you do not always confine your Sense to Verse; nor your Verses to Rhythme; nor your Rhythme to the quantity and sounds of Sillables.[41]

His words recognise, albeit diplomatically, the peculiar nature of her work that defied the stylistic 'decorum' of her day. He acknowledges her philosophy more than her poetry, turning what is conventional criticism into praise. And Cavendish was well aware of her inability to conform to the convention: Whitaker is the first to suggest that Cavendish may have had dyslexia, preferring to 'write by guesse than take the pains to learn every nice distinction' (*PPO,* 169).[42] Reading back over her *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655), the Duchess grew increasingly dissatisfied with her limited vocabulary; 'for want of scholarship, I could not express myself so well as I might have done', she writes (*LWC,* 1667, sig.A2r). Apart from Whitaker's view, this could, arguably, signal Cavendish's own paranoia and frustration that she was denied the education shared by her male peers, believing herself 'uncapable of learning'. Indeed, there are moments in which Cavendish resorts to inventing her own terminology, with very little explanation as to the meanings of these neologisms, such as 'innated' and 'incipit matter'

41 *Letters and Poems,* p. 115.

42 Whitaker, *Mad Madge,* p. 169.

('incipit' could be a misspelling of 'insipid', indicating the lifelessness of matter, or perhaps a reference to the matter's anteriority from the Latin 'incipit' ('it begins'), *PPO,* 96). In 1663, with the publication of her *Orations*, Cavendish endeavoured to find a scholar to translate her works into Latin in order to reach a wider, continental audience. She contacted Thomas Tully of St Edmund Hall, Oxford, who employed a newly arrived Etonian student to translate her *Poems and Fancies.*[43] Issues with the project soon became clear; Cavendish's eclectic terminology presented the student with a nearly impossible task, 'he tells me the hardest part […] will be how to find current Roman words to match them', Tully reported.[44]

The breadth and depth of her texts were also a focus of criticism for their obvious evasion of generic boundaries; Tully further noted that 'it would pose me something to find a proper place in any library for your Works to stand in, whether among Orators, Poets, Philosophers, States-men, or Politicians'.[45] Though Tully's comments here are not overtly negative, the eccentric confusion of Cavendish's work was a basis for much criticism. James Bristow, when asked to Latinise Cavendish's philosophy, found 'great difficulties therein, through the confusedness of the matter' – it should be noted that this more direct criticism of Cavendish's text is not included in Newcastle's compilation.[46] Eventually both works of translation were abandoned.

[43] Salzman, *Reading Early Modern Women's Writing,* p 160.

[44] *Letters and Poems*, p. 96.

[45] *Letters and Poems,* p. 94.

[46] The reference forms part of Bristow's obituary in Anthony à Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses: An Exact History of all the Writers and Bishops who have had their Education in the University of Oxford,* 3rd Edition, Volume 4 (London, 1820), p. 281.

It would seem that Cavendish's peculiar position within society – as both a member of the nobility, and a woman – brought polarised critique that, on the one hand, registered her noble status and thus mitigated its vitriol, and on the other, sought to attack her audacious shunning of seventeenth-century propriety, not least the female virtues of modesty and quiet. In this respect, the most intriguing comment on Cavendish's reputation is that offered by her contemporary Dorothy Osborne in her letters to her husband, William Temple. Like many readers who follow her, Osborne found that Cavendish's 'real fault […] was an offense against taste'.[47] In her letters to her prospective husband, Osborne is clear to perform and differentiate her modest feminine self from Cavendish's unrefined strangeness. Yet, despite dismissing the Duchess' venture into verse as 'ridiculous', she encapsulates the age's fascination with Cavendish's person(a):

> Let me ask you if you have seen a book of Poems newly come out, made by my lady Newcastle. For God's sake if you meet with it send it me, they say it is ten times more Extravagant than her dress.[48]

Osborne is simultaneously contemptuous of, and intrigued by, Cavendish's eccentricity. Her words confirm the success of Cavendish's self-fashioning; her texts are seen as an extension of herself, her true self and her authorial persona are inextricably linked. For

[47] Grant, *Margaret the First,* p. 126.

[48] '14th April 1653', Dorothy Osborne, *Letters to William Temple, 1652–54,* ed. Kenneth Parker (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 103.

all of her criticism, Osborne seeks, desperately it would seem, to join Cavendish's readership. Samuel Pepys, too, despite his dislike of the Duchess, was 'sick to see' Newcastle's play 'The Humorous Lovers' (which he mistook for the work of the Duchess), 'that I might the better understand her'.[49] Thus, the 'lady Newcastle' remains something of a curio: her 'Extravagance' both invited people to ogle and peruse, but also prevented them from championing her as an exemplary woman. Either way, it appears that, despite Cavendish's attempt to enter a 'man's world', she would be treated, not as an equal, but as a woman, and a disobedient, 'mad' one at that.

The first printed reference to Cavendish's 'madness' appears in a 1691 article of the periodical, *The Athenian Mercury,* titled 'Whether it be proper for Women to be Learned?'[50] Before this, the aspersions cast on Cavendish's sanity had been reserved for private letters; following her visit to the Royal Society in 1667, Pepys dismissed her as a 'mad, conceited, ridiculous woman'.[51] The article, too, despite crediting her with learning, implicates her sanity:

> For if we have seen one Lady gone mad with Learning, we mean a late Famous Countess, there are a hundred Men cou'd be named, whom the same Cause has rendered fit for *Bedlam*.[52]

[49] Samuel Pepys, Robert Latham and William Matthews, eds., *The Diary of Samuel Pepys,* Volume 3 (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), p. 294.
[50] *The Athenian Mercury,* vol. 1, no. 18 (23rd May 1691) transcribed in Kathryn Shevelow, *Women and Print Culture: The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodical* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 65.
[51] Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys,* ed. by Robert Latham and William Matthews, Volume 9 (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), p. 123.
[52] *The Athenian Mercury* in Kathryn Shevelow, *Women and Print Culture,* p. 65.

Though the article is the first to publicly offer this judgement in print, by this time, Cavendish's reputation was such that its editors presumed an implicit reference would suffice – their audience would know well enough to whom the 'late Famous Countess' referred. That said, her husband, William, was made Earl of Newcastle in 1628, but, by the time of their marriage in 1645, he had been Marquis of Newcastle for two years, making Cavendish a Marchioness at the time that she became his wife.[53] She had never officially received the title of Countess.[54] One possible explanation is that the Interregnum government did not recognise the title of Marchioness, at least not initially: the first editions of *Poems and Fancies* were published in 1653 with the appellations, 'the Right Honourable, the Lady Margaret Countesse of Newcastle', or more plainly, 'The Lady Newcastle'.[55] Indeed, in one first edition text, the 'Countesse' ranking is hand–corrected to read 'Marchioness', an issue rectified when the material was republished in 1664. Moreover, by the time of the article's publication, the *Athenian*'s readers may have been aware of another 'mad Duchess', Newcastle's granddaughter, Elizabeth Monck, Duchess of Albemarle (1654–1734), related to Cavendish by way of marriage.[56] The

[53] Elspeth Graham, ''An After– Game of Reputation': Systems of Representations, William Cavendish and the Battle of Marston Moor' in Edwards and Graham, *Authority, Authorship and Aristocratic*, pp. 83– 110 (p. 84).

[54] Both Shevelow and Norma Clarke (*The Rise and Fall of The Woman of Letters* (London: Random House, 2004)) make the connection between Cavendish and the late 'Countess' mentioned in the article.

[55] The title of 'Marchioness' returns more consistently to the title pages of Cavendish's work from 1655 onwards with the publication of *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*.

[56] Walpole provides anecdotal evidence of the mad Duchess, who 'fancied herself as the Empress of China' in '12th November 1763', Horace Walpole, *The Letters of Horace Walpole, Earl of Oxford,* Volume 4 (London: 1846), p. 123.

reference to the 'Countesse' may well have served to distinguish the two 'mad' women in the contemporary consciousness.

The oblique reference is testimony to the currency Cavendish had amongst the article's readers almost twenty years after her death. Unlike the other women mentioned in the article – 'Madame Philips', the 'matchless' poetess, and 'Van Schurman', the first female university student, both of whom were respected for their ability – Cavendish is not named; her reputation precedes her.[57] If one is to interpret her life and work in light of the tradition of melancholic genius, then, at first reading, the *Athenian* article is surely evidence of her success in achieving membership. Ostensibly, at least, she is attributed with the fame she craved; that she was driven 'mad with Learning' connotes the phenomena of 'cacoethes scribendi' and the saturnine brilliance to which she aspired. At last, Cavendish's experience is equated with that of learned men. However, the piece is couched with ambiguity and the reference to Cavendish can be read as less than favourable; she is not honoured with a nominal mention, but is instead reduced to her persona, a caricature. The admission that she had 'gone mad with Learning', an arguably noble condition, is quickly reduced to outright insanity: she is 'fit for *Bedlam*'.

Alluding to the asylum, the article suggests that Cavendish ought to be known, not for her genial melancholy, but for a maniacal madness that should be confined within four walls. Regardless of his intentions, John Dunton's words here, as editor of

[57] *The Athenian Mercury* in Kathryn Shevelow, *Women and Print Culture,* p. 65.

the periodical and presumed author of the piece, do little to overturn the antipathy Cavendish had faced throughout her life, and instead feed into the myth in which the extravagance and ostentation of her person(a) was deemed the stuff of insanity, rather than that of a remarkable, if untutored, mind. His words are made all the more condemnatory when one considers the otherwise benign nature of his periodical, particularly when discussing women. The *Athenian Mercury* was known as a 'popularizer' of information not only 'to all men, as well as to both the Sexes' with one issue a month devoted to 'ladies' topics', the focus of which soon became a publication all of its own in the *Ladies' Mercury* (established in 1693).[58]

Indeed, the article posits the question, 'All grant that [women] may have some Learning, but the question is of what sort, and to what Degree?'[59] It lists the typical responses offered by its male readers: that women should be allowed to read, but not write, and then only plays, novels and romances, not the 'edge-tools of philosophy'. The article parodies the view of those men who suggest that philosophy distracts women: 'it takes 'em off from their domestic affairs […] it generally fills 'em too full of themselves, and makes 'em apt to despise others'. Dunton counters that 'there's few Men who have Wit, Sence, or Learning, but they know it, tho' often they are so prudent to conceal such their Knowledge from the World'. The connection between accomplishment and pride is, he suggests, 'a weakness common to our own Sex as well as theirs'. His argument is such that Rae Blanchard groups him with late seventeenth-century 'reformers',

[58] Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 306– 7.

[59] *The Athenian Mercury* in Kathryn Shevelow, *Women and Print Culture,* p. 65.

'advocates of rational feminism, refusing, in the name of reason, to admit a natural inequality between the sexes'.[60] Despite his otherwise broadminded support for the intellectual empowerment of women (encouraged by the universal distribution of knowledge), then, Dunton finds Cavendish an exception to the notion of 'learned women', rather than exceptional amongst them. Indeed, Kathryn Shevelow suggests that his position as 'reformer' is nuanced; though Dunton employs 'the rhetoric of equality', he defines it 'in a way consistent with the notion of a natural difference between men and women'.[61]

Shevelow's premise is supported by a series of treatises published after the accession of Queen Anne in 1702, in which Dunton blamed the burgeoning '*Female Government'* for the rise in fiercely aspirational women. In a stark departure from his earlier moderation, he writes that 'the *Body* of every Woman (*from the Queen to the Country Joan*) is full of Danger'.[62] Shortly after, in anticipation of a likely backlash, Dunton is sure to honour the opposing view by ventriloquising the voice of a female objector, 'there's no Sex in the Mind', (s)he writes,

> *[F]or if we look into* Genesis*, we shall find that* Woman *was the last work in the Creation, and so the most perfect and absolute, as we see when Artificers make an*

[60] Blanchard, Rae, 'Richard Steele and the Status of Women', *Studies in Philology,* 26 (1929), pp. 325– 55 (p. 329).

[61] Shevelow, *Women and Print Culture*, p. 66.

[62] John Dunton, *A Cat May Look Upon a Queen, Or a Satyr on her present Majesty* (London, 1708), p. 15; Sarah Apetrei, *Women, Feminism and Religion in Early Enlightenment England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 5.

> *excellent Piece, they keep Polishing till the last, as being the Perfection and Crown of it.*[63]

It is significant that this female persona should cite Eve, who submits to her husband, rather than Sappho, the prized representative of poetesses. Moreover, she alludes to Eve *before* the Fall; the reader is aware that her 'Perfection' does not last. Such was the nature of the argument for and against the education of women, the humanist debate of the *querelle des femmes*. While Dunton effectively mimics the voices on both sides, as Shevelow suggests, his words veer towards an essentialist view of gender difference, in which women are known to be '*more Charming in their Face, of a sweeter Voice, and more Spiritual in their Inward Beauty than Men'*.[64] Helen Berry, too, identifies a marked difference between the Athenian Society's favourable attitude towards women's education and that towards female bodies.[65] Though ostensibly articulating the views of '*Female Advocates*', Dunton's rhetoric contributes to 'a prescriptive image of women' and what it is to be feminine.[66]

iii. *The Connoisseur*: Mr Town's Dream

[63] Dunton, *A Cat May Look Upon a Queen*, p. 16, p. 19– 20.

[64] Ibid; Shevelow, *Women and Print Culture*, p. 66.

[65] Helen Berry, *Gender, Society and Print Culture in Late– Stuart England: The Cultural World of the* Athenian Mercury (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 71– 2.

[66] Shevelow, *Women and Print Culture*, p. 66.

How, then, was this disparity resolved elsewhere and, specifically, in reference to Cavendish? In an overlooked article from an eighteenth-century periodical, some eighty years after her death, Cavendish was revived as a reckless, singular eccentric by the essayists George Colman and Bonnell Thornton. Their writing forms part of the London periodical, *The Connoisseur*, originally published between January 31st 1754 and September 30th 1756, which dealt in socio-political issues of the day. Their articles tackled concerns about freethinking, whispering and giggling in church, boxing, marriage, death and recurrently, the nature of women. The articles, many of which take the form of letters, are signed by various fictional contributors; alongside these valedictions appear one of the letters – 'T.', 'O.', 'W.' and 'N.'. In the introduction to the text, these letters are referred to as the initials of four different 'ingenious and learned gentlemen'.[67] Yet, taken together, these letters form 'Town', and 'Mr. Town' is, in turn, the pseudonym adopted by Colman and Thornton for the 'Critic and Censor-General' whose observations fill their pages. In this complex play on authorship, then, Colman and Thornton look to displace the identity of the author of the, at times, virulent lampooning within. By 1767, however, Colman and Thornton had been identified as the true authors of the volume. A significant clue to their involvement in the periodical is a reference to their anthology of women's poetry, *Poems by Eminent Ladies*, which is not

[67] This quotation does not appear in the original edition of the periodical reproduced on *ECCO* (*Eighteenth Century Collections Online*), but does appear in the same 'second' edition of the text (1755– 57), a copy of which is held at the Cadbury Research Library at the University of Birmingham. It forms part of an appendage, which begins: '**Before I dismiss this new edition of my work, I think it my duty to return thanks to my kind readers for their candid reception of these paper, as they were separately published', Volume 4, p. 164.

only described as 'the most solid compliment that can possibly be paid to the fair sex', but catalyses a fascinating, if ambivalent, tableau on writing women.[68]

In the article, dated May 22nd 1755, the author praises the *Poems* volume for its display of a 'great number of very elegant pieces among the compositions of these ladies, which cannot be surpassed (I had almost said, equalled) by the most celebrated of our male writers'.[69] The text, he continues, 'made such an impression on my mind, that at night, as soon as I fell asleep, my fancy presented to me the following vision'.
The writer is transported to the court of Apollo in the regions of Parnassus, in which it is debated whether male and female poets should be considered equal and 'hold the same rank', with Juvenal defending men, and the problematic Sappho petitioning for her fellow poetesses.[70] Ultimately, 'Apollo could no longer resist the importunity of the Muses in favour of their own sex'.[71] It is therefore decreed that the female poets present should 'show their skill and dexterity' in writing verse through their ability to manage Pegasus, the Muses' horse.[72] One might imagine that Cavendish would have approved of this tableau: winged horses featured prominently in her husband's portraiture, in his own manual on horsemanship (*A new method, and extraordinary invention, to dress horses* (1667)) and on the ceilings at another of the family's residences, Bolsover Castle.[73] In the article, however, horses are more so a feature of the Session of the Poets

[68] Mr Town, *The Connoisseur* (1755), *ECCO,* Number LXIX, p. 409.
[69] Ibid.
[70] *The Connoisseur*, p. 410.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] For more, see Graham, 'An After– Game of Reputation', p. 103.

genre than they are an acknowledgement of Cavendish's background specifically. Having disputed who should ride first, it is agreed that the women should ride 'according to seniority'. This article, and specifically Cavendish's role within it, has not hitherto been discussed in length, though brief paraphrases may be found in Cavendish criticism from the nineteenth century, such as the edited editions of Cavendish's poetry by Egerton Brydges (1813) and Edward Jenkins (1872). In the century that followed, Joseph Knight includes a reference to the periodical's 'fanciful picture' in his entry for Cavendish in the burgeoning *Dictionary of National Biography* (1917). Later, the Duchess' first biographer, Douglas Grant, briefly considers the entry and its 'excellent' decision to include a passage from her 'Dialogue between Melancholy and Mirth' – a poem, he writes, which suitably conveys the 'unexpected qualities' of her work (1957). Departing from previous references to Colman and Thornton's work, I believe that the account offers a telling insight, not only into their interpretation of Cavendish's idiosyncratic work but, more interestingly, into how this directly compares and contrasts with the perception of other learned women of her time.

As the dreamscape continues, the first lady to get into the saddle 'had something rather extravagant in her air and deportment, yet she had a noble presence, that commanded at once awe and admiration', and is identified as none other than 'the Dutchess of NEWCASTLE'.[74] Jumping into the saddle 'with surprising agility', the Duchess gave 'an entire loose to the reins, Pegasus directly set up a gallop, and ran away with her quite out of sight'.[75] The dream thus takes on an allegorical significance in

[74] *The Connoisseur*, p. 411.

[75] Ibid.

which each woman commands Pegasus according to the style of her own writing as it is represented in the archives of history. Cavendish's ability to command her horse, depicted here in Mr Town's dream, is a significant metaphor for the way in which her poetry was received by the generations of writers that followed her. That the Duchess immediately encourages her horse to gallop at full speed intimates the irascible, indecorous energy that fills the pages of her oeuvre. Regardless, 'it was acknowledged', the narrator continues, 'that she kept a firm seat, even when the horse went at his deepest rate'.[76] The dreamer recognises a semblance of control in her dynamism; her speed and risk is intentional and provocative, 'she wanted nothing but to ride with a curb-bridle', an instrument used to forcibly accelerate the horse.[77]

One realises the peculiarity of Cavendish's depiction in this dreamscape when it is compared to the next woman to take the horse, Katherine Philips. Unlike Cavendish, Philips mounts Pegasus 'amid the shouts and applauses of the Lords *Roscommon* and *Orrery*, *Cowley* and other famous wits of her time', each of whom contributed commendatory verse to the posthumous 1667 edition of her poems.[78] Much attention is paid to the way that the women look and how the women's respective outfits reflect their appeal to contemporary tastes. Philips' dress 'approached very nearly to the cut and fashion of the present age' and is simply cut with 'no profuse ornaments'.[79] Cavendish, on the other hand, is dated by her 'old fashioned habit, very fantastic, and

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid.

[78] *The Connoisseur*, p. 412; Philips, *Poems by the most deservedly admire Mrs. Katherine Philips,* sig. B2r, sig. B1r, and sig. B2v.

[79] *The Connoisseur*, p. 412.

trimmed with bugles and points'.[80] If the Duchess' heavily embellished gown reflects not only her status, but the extravagant and ostentatious nature of her persona, Philip's plain dress makes manifest her modest and well-tempered character. Her command of Pegasus is similarly restrained: she 'never ventured beyond a canter or a hand-gallop, she made Pegasus do his paces with so much ease and exactness, that Waller himself owned he could never bring him under so much command'.[81] Amongst the other women who undertake the challenge – Mary Leapor, Mary Barber, Constantia Grierson and Laetitia Pilkington – is 'the free– spirited Mrs Behn'.[82] Depicted as 'a bold masculine figure', Behn insists on riding astride Pegasus, her self-assurance typically figured as uncomfortably erotic: 'she made the poor beast frisk and caper, […] while she herself was quite unconcerned, though she shewed her legs at every motion of the horse, and many of the Muses turned their heads aside blushing'.[83] If Philips is hailed as exemplary amongst the onlookers, the paradigm of women's writing typified by modesty and control, then Behn is her opposite. The two women occupy polarised positions in the satire, conforming and subverting their gendered roles respectively. Where, then, might one place Cavendish? By comparison, Cavendish's actions are neither praised, nor admonished by the members of Apollo's court. Indeed, as the satire progresses, the Duchess' place within it grows increasingly ambivalent; she is pushed to the fringes – with all the horsemanship, or artistic flair, admired in Behn, but lacking in the taste and restraint preferred in Philips. Despite her otherwise hermaphroditic choreography in

[80] *The Connoisseur*, p. 411.

[81] *The Connoisseur*, p. 412.

[82] *The Connoisseur*, p. 413.

[83] Ibid.

her life and works, Cavendish is not subjected to the same sexual opprobrium as Behn. She may not share in Philips' feminine modesty, but she does not partake in Behn's bombastic masculine display either; she is neither admired, nor hated.

Colman and Thornton's narrator also gives particular significance to the male figures who watch the proceedings. Mary Barber, for example, is helped to the saddle by Jonathan Swift, 'who even condescended to hold the stirrup while she mounted', a figurative representation of his patronage throughout her career.[84] It is peculiar, then, that in the Duchess' tableau, 'when she came to dismount, *Shakespeare* and *Milton* very kindly offered their hand to help her down, which she accepted'.[85] Instead of helping her up onto Pegasus, these men encourage her to dismount, bringing an end to her opportunity to convey her poetic ability; the narrator's vision makes manifest Cavendish's problematic engagement with the male writers of her time. The Duchess was a professed admirer of Shakespeare, publishing the 'first sustained evaluation' of him 'as playwright' with many various parallels drawn between their work, such as Cavendish's *The Convent of Pleasure* (1668) and her reimagining of Wat, the hare.[86] The narrator appears to intimate Cavendish's frustrated ambition to share in his celebrity: perhaps by accepting his hand down from Pegasus, acquiescing to his precedence, she forgoes her opportunity to demonstrate her own writing ability. By comparison, Milton – though an immediate contemporary – does not feature either implicitly or explicitly in

[84] Ibid.

[85] *The Connoisseur*, p. 411.

[86] See Irene Dash, 'Single– Sex Retreats in Two Early Modern Dramas: *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Convent of Pleasure*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 47:4 (1996), pp. 387– 95, (p. 388– 9).

her work. Colman and Thornton do, however, imply their connection. Encouraged by Euterpe, muse of lyric poetry, the Duchess recites 'those beautiful lines against melancholy' from her own verse, following which,

> Milton seemed very much chagrined; and it was whispered by some, that he was obliged for many of the thoughts in his L'Allegro and Il Penseroso to this lady's Dialogue between Mirth and Melancholy.
> N.B. This lady wrote before Milton.[87]

Colman and Thornton's narrator makes a bold claim that Milton steals Cavendish's ideas. In the later editions, the nota becomes more cautious, 'it is supposed', they suggest, that she wrote before Milton, but the implication still remains. Much like her links to Shakespeare, then, Cavendish's connection to Milton is made decidedly fraught. Though the dates of the composition and publication of their melancholy poetry are close, and the truth of the matter ultimately inconclusive, it is reasonable to suggest that Milton would have had no knowledge of Cavendish's work when his companion poems were published in his 1645 octavo of verse. It is widely accepted that Cavendish began writing in exile in 1644 and continued more intensely with Newcastle's blessing following their marriage in 1645. For Milton to have seen an early copy of Cavendish's work is unlikely; there is no evidence that Cavendish conformed to the aristocratic tradition of manuscript circulation, but instead preferred to oversee her work in print. Her 'Dialogue' was published as part of her first text, *Poems and Fancies*, in 1653. The

[87] *The Connoisseur*, p. 412.

suggestion of rumour present in Colman and Thornton's periodical may, then, intend to demonstrate Cavendish's displacement in the wider literary tradition by her male contemporaries. She apparently forfeits her own material to Milton, who will go on to harbour a greater reputation than herself.

Cavendish is, therefore, doubly betrayed by a system in which women's writing is deemed inferior. The narrator's assessment of her contribution to this burgeoning, if shirked, tradition remains ambivalent; she conforms to neither exemplary, nor dissident, models of womanhood – her garb is mocked, her riding shocks, but her quoted verse is embraced and even plagiarised. Salzman is clear to acknowledge the limits of this, however, noting that Cavendish's verse (the 'small canon' included in anthologies of the period) was frequently bowdlerised to eliminate 'earthy or physical' elements.[88] In this regard, her inclusion in Colman and Thornton's own anthology, *Poems by the Most Eminent Ladies of Great Britain and Ireland* (1755), is no different, the latter editions of which included only two edited sections from her Queen Mab poems. It would seem that Cavendish's character, her eccentric persona, had a more lasting impact than her work and perhaps distracted from her sincere, though impudent, attempt to claim her place in the English literary tradition. The conclusion of the article as a whole is equally indeterminate. Indeed, the issue is posed by the introductory epigrams, which appears firstly as

Quid femina possit. VIRGIL.

[88] Salzman, *Reading Early Modern Women's Writing,* p. 164.

[What a woman can do][89]

and later includes the following verse, attributed to 'Tibull' (presumably Tibullus, c. 55 BC – c. 19 BC),

Dignior est vestro nulla puella choro.
[No girl is more worthy of your chorus]
Behold a train of female wits aspire,
With men to mingle in the Muses's quire.[90]

The highly charged matter of whether male and female poets should share equal renown is ended abruptly as Pilkington slaps the dreamer's face, causing him to wake 'at the instant'.[91] The precedent for similar 'sessions' poems is similarly ambiguous. Indeed, John Suckling produced the earliest form, called 'The Wits [A Sessions of the Poets]' (tentatively dated to 1637, but printed in 1646), which depicted the leading poets of the time in competition for the title of laureate. Ultimately, though, an alderman is crowned: ''twas the best signe/ Of good store of wit to have a goode store of coyn'.[92] As Michael Gavin suggests, the various imitations of Suckling's poem that followed, *The Connoisseur* included, look to present poets as 'a special group in need of regulation'.[93] It provided

[89] *The Connoisseur*, p. 409.
[90] The verse appears in the second edition of the collected articles published in 1755.
[91] *The Connoisseur*, p. 414.
[92] Michael Gavin, *The Invention of English Criticism, 1650– 1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 57– 8.
[93] Michael Gavin, *The Invention of English Criticism*, p. 57.

Colman and Thornton with a fitting poetic model through which to examine the validity of female authorship; nonetheless, the abrupt end of the periodical's entry allows its authors to avoid having to crown a victor in either Juvenal or Sappho. Besides, in the women's attempt to demonstrate their ability, Cavendish is side-lined, a fringe figure too eccentric to be taken seriously. As Bazeley writes, not all of these women were considered lunatic. It was Cavendish's audacity, 'the *boldness* of [her] public voice – not only in her choice and range of genre, but also in her privileging of a complicated woman's subjectivity' that sealed her fate.[94]

iv. Cavendish's Critical Heritage

Colman and Thornton's piece is perhaps most significant for demonstrating Cavendish's dislocation in the literary canon. Only eighty years after her death, *The Connoisseur* article suggests that the Duchess is neither viewed with admiration, like Philips, or suspicion, like Behn. And yet, it would be wrong to suggest that Cavendish's work and writing persona were met with apathy. This chapter will therefore look to map the responses to her texts in the centuries that followed her death in 1673: how might we trace the course of Cavendish's reputation from the strangely impressive figure in *The Connoisseur* to the lunatic writer of forgotten texts, 'moulder[ing] in the gloom of

[94] Deborah Bazeley, 'Rethinking 'Mad Madge'' (March, 2009), www.she– philosopher.com [accessed January 2019].

public libraries', recorded by Woolf?[95] Did readers of Cavendish appreciate, or at least acknowledge, her self-styled genius?

Given the lack of comprehensive records detailing the purchase or acquisition of Cavendish's work both in private homes and public libraries, the reproduction of her writing in anthologies is perhaps a more consistent way of tracking the development of her authorial persona through the centuries. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century, Cavendish's poems were frequently anthologised in collections of 'eminent' female poets, the presentation of which reveals much about how her work was received by her readers. In 1755, Colman and Thornton's first edition of *Poems by Eminent Ladies* included a brief biography detailing Cavendish's early 'inclination to learning' and her 'wild native genius'.[96] The poems included show a rich diversity of dialogues between Mirth and Melancholy, Peace and War, ruminations on Death, Wit and a selection of poems on Queen Mab and fairies.[97] In the later editions, published in 1773 and again in 1780, the scope of *Eminent Ladies* was expanded, but Cavendish's section is significantly shortened. Her biography is removed, and the selection of her poetry provided is reduced to those only on Queen Mab which, when isolated, appear quite frivolous. The Queen Mab poems do little to convey the breadth of Cavendish's natural philosophy. As Margaret Ezell, in her *Writing Women's Literary History,* suggests, the narrowing of focus in these later editions 'prepare[s] the way' for the nineteenth-century's preferred taste

[95] Woolf, *The Common Reader,* p. 98.

[96] Anon, ed., *Poems by Eminent Ladies,* Volume 2 (London, 1755), p. 198.

[97] *Poems by Eminent Ladies,* p. 199– 211.

for 'decorous delicacy' written by women of equally fragile sensibilities.[98] The ability of such anthologies to dictate the canon with their insular tastes no doubt contributed to the view that much of Cavendish's work, seemingly unsuitable for inclusion, was distasteful and peculiar.

An element of this undoubtedly influenced Charles Lamb's (1775 – 1834) assessment of 'the thrice noble, chaste, and virtuous – but again somewhat fantastical, and original-brain'd, generous, Margaret Newcastle'.[99] Lamb, reflecting the Romanticism of his generation, goes some way to reasserting Cavendish's reputation as a woman of exceeding imagination; she is 'generous' in sharing the original conceptions of her singular mind. This comment is, however, staged as a caveat to her modest femininity with the tentative, almost spluttering, conjunction, 'but again somewhat'. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that in the anthologies that follow Lamb, from Alexander Dyce (1825) and Frederick Rowton (1848), considerable space is afforded Cavendish's Queen Mab poems, while her subversive philosophy, her more solemn, political poetry and risqué dramas are either clipped or entirely absent.[100] Taken together, these texts work to censor the more intellectual, if controversial, elements of Cavendish's writing, namely her bold philosophy. Aphra Behn's canon is similarly sanitised; Rowton introduces her as 'one of the most prominent, but one of the least estimable' of the female poets included in his text. Behn's writing is affected by 'great grossness of thought' and 'an

[98] Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History,* p. 117.

[99] Charles Lamb, *Essays of Elia*, p. 173.

[100] Alexander Dyce, ed., *Specimens of British Poetesses* (London, 1825), pp. 88– 98; Frederick Rowton, ed., *The Female Poets of Great Britain* (London, 1848), p. 79– 82.

essential coarseness of passion' that 'depraves nearly all she writes'.[101] Rowton's editorial notes offer a more condemnatory view of the women, though his comments share the same evaluation as *The Connoisseur* article: Behn is depicted as the more radical figure, her ambition and experimentation makes her crude and untamed, while Cavendish is comparatively marginalised and her legacy forgotten.

By the late nineteenth century, then, Cavendish's writing had been sentimentalised, even trivialised, to include only the exhaustive detail of Mab's kingdom. Rowton's assessment of her writing as 'insufferably tame, commonplace, and prosy' strikes one as remarkably polarised to her reception amongst her seventeenth-century contemporaries, who interpreted, and repeatedly admonished, its peculiar idiosyncrasies. Rowton's text, *The Female Poets of Great Britain,* is organised according to the 'distinctions' he observes between the genders: his introduction includes an anatomy of gender difference in which 'Man is bold, enterprising, and strong; woman cautious, prudent, and steadfast […] The qualities of the Female Intellect seem to be rather negative than positive: they appear to be fitted more for passive endurance than for aggressive exertion'.[102] In fact, his work is even progressive in its assertion that women's sphere of influence 'requires a *different* mental constitution from that of man, not an *inferior* one'.[103] Regardless, Cavendish's own progressive articulations of gender and politics are absent from the volume. His depiction of Cavendish as 'tame' and 'commonplace' was most likely informed by an earlier inclination to sanitise – and in so

[101] Rowton, *The Female Poets of Great Britain,* p. 93.
[102] Rowton, *The Female Poets of Great Britain,* p. xvi.
[103] Rowton, *The Female Poets of Great Britain,* p. xv.

doing, minimise – her oeuvre. Moreover, the popularity of his anthology served to perpetuate this skewed presentation of Cavendish, whose character and work had been forced to conform to his particular mould of womanhood.

As with any writer, Cavendish's reputation in the centuries following her death was dictated by the fashion, taste and decorum of the era concerned. Though Lamb had encouraged the appreciation of the 'confusedness' of Cavendish's work as the product of her vast imagination, she could not evade the seemingly concomitant jibes at her lack of decorum. One could argue that Lamb's estimation of Cavendish only served to exacerbate her eccentricity in the minds of later critics. Indeed, the literary historian Alexander Dyce (1798 – 1869) notes that 'her writings show that she possessed a mind of considerable power and activity, with much imagination, but not one particle of judgment or taste'.[104] His words echo those of Egerton Brydges (1762 – 1837), who, having produced a small volume of Cavendish's work in 1813, similarly noted,

> Her imagination was quick, copious, and sometimes even beautiful, yet her taste appear to have been not only uncultivated, but, perhaps, originally defective.[105]

She 'knew not what to obtrude, and what to leave out', Brydges continues, 'pouring forth everything with an undistinguishing hand, and [mixing] the serious, the colloquial and

[104] Alexander Dyce, *Specimens of British Poetesses,* p. 88.

[105] 'Advertisement' in Sir Egerton Brydges, ed., *Selected Poems of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle* (Lee Priory, 1813), p. preface (pages are not paginated and are not marked by signatures).

even the vulgar, in a manner which cannot be defended'.[106] In the comments made by Brydges and Dyce, then, one can ascertain the supposed impropriety that Rowton chose to abandon from his anthology, it is not suited to his view of women as 'timid, clinging and dependent'.[107] Her status as Duchess only made her ambition and crudity more shocking, 'flowing from a female of high rank, brought up in the courts'.[108] One could argue that Cavendish's proto–feminist ideologies, kept in check by her conservative politics, effectively negated her 'relevance' to future generations: she was neither of her time, nor was she wholly forward–looking. She was neither a paragon of her age, like the matchless Orinda, nor was she a maverick, like Behn. As a result, Cavendish and her work were cast adrift with the value of much of her fictional work similarly overlooked.

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, her reputation as a poetess was in decline. Instead, she was increasingly figured as a social commentator; her biography of Newcastle, *The Life of William,* was heralded by various critics as her most significant work, not necessarily for its literary merit, but for its 'amusing and instructive minutiae'.[109] An article in *The Spectator*, dated 5th April 1873, testifies to its popularity: the *Life* was 'never reprinted since 1668 till now', it reads. The intervening centuries gave rise to a specific interest in the 'strange, rambling, gushing, and egotistical volume, […] a genuine account of a somewhat exceptional phase of old life and manners'.[110] Here,

[106] Ibid.

[107] Rowton, *The Female Poets of Great Britain,* p. xvi.

[108] Brydges, *Selected Poems of Margaret Cavendish*, p. Advertisment.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *The Spectator,* 'Books – The First Duke and Duchess of Newcastle', April 5th (1873), p. 443.

the eccentric qualities of Cavendish's style, though criticised in her poetry, are embraced as a charmingly authentic account of a bygone age. The biography's nineteenth-century readers evidently placed more value in the retelling of the lives of men, than on the women who observed and recorded them. Cavendish's account of Newcastle's life appealed to the nineteenth-century vogue for historiography; it is little surprise, then, that the era witnessed a renewed interest in texts of a similar type, notably the publication, and continued republication, of Lucy Hutchinson's *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson* (1671) from 1806.

The next notable step in the progression of Cavendish's reputation was the advent of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, which was rolled out every quarter between 1885 and 1900. Cavendish's reputation as a prose writer, poet and dramatist was revived, if not endorsed, by the drama critic Joseph Knight (1829 – 1907):

> She does not hesitate to introduce wanton characters and to employ language which goes beyond coarseness. Her philosophy is the dead weight which drags her to the ground. In these deliveries an occasional piece of common sense is buried in avalanches of ignorance and extravagance.[111]

In accordance with his contemporaries, Knight's scathing critique is stopped abruptly by his praise for her biographical commentary: 'Her life of the duke is in its way a masterpiece […] Not easy is it to find a picture so faithful and attractive of an English

[111] Joseph Knight, 'Cavendish, Margaret', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Archive* (1886) <https://doi.org/10.1093/odnb/9780192683120.013.4940> [accessed January 2019].

interior'.[112] For all Knight's criticism, that Cavendish is included in the volume at all is telling given the few women deemed worthy enough to gain entry. In the dictionary's first volume, only 35 of 505 biographies concerned women and only 45 of 653 contributors were women, a pattern that was repeated across all early volumes.[113] The dictionary was evidently a catalogue of male achievements written by, and presumably for, men. Despite this, as was recorded in his 1907 obituary, Cavendish's entry was reportedly one of Knight's own favourites of the 500 he produced.[114] If this was true, he was still reluctant to share his appreciation; he cites a new edition of her work, published by Edward Jenkins in 1816, within which 'so much of the literary baggage of the duchess as time will care to burden itself with is preserved'.[115]

Knight's account in the *Dictionary* undoubtedly influenced the views of Virginia Woolf, whose father, Leslie Stephen, was one of two main compilers involved in the original *DNB* project. Much of Knight's critique is reimagined in Woolf's *The Common Reader* (1925): 'her philosophies are futile, and her plays intolerable, and her verse mainly dull', she writes.[116] The motive for Woolf's text is, however, less academic than the dictionary. As the title suggests, she analyses from the perspective of the 'common'

[112] Ibid.

[113] Kay Ferres, 'Gender, Biography, the Public Sphere', in Peter France and William St Clair, eds., *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 303– 320, (p. 308).

[114] *The Athenaeum,* No. 4157, June 20th, 1907 (p. 791).

[115] Jenkins includes sections of prefatory material from *Poems and Fancies* and extensively from 'The Convent of Pleasure'. He also includes a poem on 'Sorrow' (page 87– 89), which appears nowhere else in the Cavendish canon.

[116] Woolf, *The Common Reader,* p. 108.

reader, who differs from both 'the critic and the scholar'[117]. These readers are 'worse educated', only reading for 'his own pleasure rather than to impart knowledge or correct the opinions of others'.[118] The common reader, who 'does not have a method, only a passion: reading', is posited as a more suitable audience for the Duchess' work.[119] With her philosophy and politics written out of her anthologised work for almost 200 hundred years, what remained was a profusion of poetry and drama spanning the reasonable and the fantastical. According to Woolf, that Cavendish's writing is decidedly method-less means that only its 'charm' can convince one who reads for pleasure, rather than for education or study. Though it goes some way to acknowledging her singular 'authentic fire', *The Common Reader* does little to revive and authenticate Cavendish's desire to be taken seriously as a writer.[120]

Here, Cavendish's hubris is her capriciousness: in an image strikingly similar to that in *The Connoisseur*'s article, Woolf suggests that 'the wildest fancies come to her, and she canters away on their backs'. She had a 'wild streak', Woolf writes, 'for ever upsetting the orderly arrangement of nature'.[121] Across her career, taking together her deliberations on Cavendish in *The Common Reader* (1925) and later in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Woolf grapples with the same issue highlighted by Colman and Thornton, and again by Cavendish's contemporary, Thomas Tully, who fails to find a 'proper place' for the Duchess' work. Though centuries apart, each of them struggle to effectively

[117] Woolf, *The Common Reader,* p. 11.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Woolf, *The Common Reader,* p. 108.
[121] Woolf, *The Common Reader,* p. 100.

categorise Cavendish. She is a woman, but one simultaneously dislocated from her sex by her ambition to infiltrate masculine spheres of knowledge; she is 'a giant cucumber which spread itself over all the roses and carnations in the garden'.[122] A vision of 'loneliness and riot', she has 'the irresponsibility of a child and the arrogance of a Duchess'.[123] Woolf's assertion that Cavendish's writing is little but 'moulder in the gloom' of public libraries might be explained by her accreted dislocation from the literary canon. Her work, particularly that involving an idiosyncratic pastiche of contemporary science, philosophy and politics, was gravely susceptible to the changes in tastes and fashions as the centuries progressed. What appeal she did have to readers appears to be driven by her extravagant and bombastic character, more than by the value of her work. Her claims to genius were, it seems, somewhat doomed: she exists somewhere between fascination and repulsion, and in the midst her work is forgotten and, with it, her contribution to the study of melancholic and genial femininity.

[122] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own,* p. 61.

[123] Woolf, *The Common Reader,* p. 103.

Conclusion

Costumes and Chimeras: Cavendish's Mask-Making

On Friday 26th April 1667, Samuel Pepys records a visit to London during which he crosses paths with 'my Lady Newcastle' for the first time.[1] He is at pains to detail the profligacy of her entourage; 'all the town-talk is now-a-days of her extravagancies', he writes.[2] Cavendish's outfit is, as ever, designed to encourage such chatter: her hair flows provocatively 'about her ears', she is 'naked-necked', wearing a masculine 'juste-au-corps' (a knee-length fitted coat) in her signature blend of male and female dress.[3] The scene is also designed to demonstrate her vast wealth: her silver coach and footmen are clothed in velvet, the Duchess wears a 'velvet cap' with 'many black patches […] about her mouth', which are, presumably, also made of velvet. These patches – called 'mouches' (French for 'flies' due to their small size) – were typically cut from black velvet or taffeta and adhered to the face.[4] Their purpose was twofold. Pepys identifies the first, suggesting that Cavendish uses them to conceal 'pimples about her mouth'.[5] And yet, these 'mouches' were also considered an essential part of female costume, particularly in the French court. In John Bulwer's popular social study, *Anthropometamorphosis* (1650), he notes the recent 'invention of black Patches, wherein

1 Latham and Matthews, eds., *The Diary of Samuel Pepys,* Volume 8, p. 186.

2 Latham and Matthews *The Diary*, p. 186.

3 Latham and Matthews *The Diary,* p. 186– 7.

4 Kimberley Chrisman– Campbell, 'Dressing to Impress' in Charissa Bremer– David, *Paris: Life & Luxury in the Eighteenth Century* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2011), pp. 53– 74 (p. 63).

5 Latham and Matthews*, The Diary,* p. 186.

the French shewed their witty pride, which could so cunningly turne Botches into Beauty'.[6] Given her time spent with Henrietta Maria, together with her decade on the continent in exile, it is highly likely that Cavendish was aware of the patches' tantalising signification beyond merely concealing blemishes. Not only did the black dots accentuate the desirable whiteness of the face, but depending on their positioning, they could also denote if the bearer was brazen, indecisive, playful or passionate.[7] Regardless of their use, these mouches make manifest a significant, if not the *most* significant, part of Cavendish's character– her mask-making. They appear at various points throughout her oeuvre, and always with an acknowledgement of their symbolic value as 'marks of pride' or 'Black Patches of Ignorance, to stick on/ The *Face* of *Fooles*'. According to Cavendish, they form part of a larger costume, a façade, that – as she travelled through London in 1667 – was designed not only to convey her wealth and vanity with continental flair, but also to inspire intrigue, admiration and aversion.

The patches are not included on any of Cavendish's official portraits, so their exact use or positioning on her face is unknown. Their absence could be explained either by her narcissism, in wanting her face depicted without the flaws that these patches disguised, or as evidence that they were merely cosmetic and taken on and off for the

[6] John Bulwer, *Anthropometamorphosis* (London, 1650), p. 272– 3.

[7] In eighteenth century England, the 'mouches' were used to indicate one's political affiliation: Addison notes in *The Spectator* in 1711 how women were often 'patched differently; the faces, on one hand being spotted on the right side of the forehead, and those upon the other on the left' denoting Whigs and Tories, respectively (*The Spectator,* No 81 Saturday, June 2 in *The Works of the Right Honourable Joseph Addison*, Volume 2 (London: 1721), p. 568); Sara M. Harvey, 'The Seventeenth Century' in Jill Condra, ed., *The Greenwood Encyclopaedia of Clothing Through World History: 1501– 1800* (Greenwood Press: Connecticut, 2008), pp. 79– 164 (p. 147).

sake of public appearances like that which Pepys recalls. Either way, Pepys' relation of her ostentatious parade through London only intensifies her mythic status: the 'whole story of this lady is a romance, and all she do is [*sic*] romantic', he writes.[8] The comment is at once admiring and suspicious. In this context, 'romance' might refer to her evocative, glamorous style (he describes Windsor Castle in the same vein: 'it is the most romantique castle that is in the world'), but it might also betray her affectedness.[9] A month later, on 30th May, whilst chronicling her famous visit to the Royal Society, Pepys disparages her 'antic' dress and comparatively 'ordinary' deportment.[10] He recognises and admonishes a tangible asymmetry and antithesis in her character: despite her impish dress, reminiscent of the theatrical clown or buffoon, Cavendish's manners are base and even dreary – 'I do not like her at all, nor did I hear her say anything that was worth hearing'.[11] Pepys is among the first voices in Cavendish criticism to identify two sides to her character: an anterior 'self' occluded by an intensely choreographed public façade. Woolf, too, some three hundred years later, acknowledges the Duchess' doubleness; her young life 'at once so cloistered and so free', though punctuated by solitude and contemplation, bred within her a 'wild streak' that manifested itself in a polarised obsession with 'finery and extravagance and fame'.[12] It is telling, then, that Woolf's *The Common Reader* retells the episode from Pepys' diary thus:

8 Latham and Matthews, *The Diary,* p. 163.

9 Latham and Matthews, eds., *The Diary of Samuel Pepys,* Volume 7, p. 58.

10 Latham and Matthews, *The Diary,* p. 243.

11 Latham and Matthews, eds., *The Diary of Samuel Pepys,* Volume 8, p. 243.

12 Woolf, *The Common Reader*, p. 100.

> on she drove through the crowd of staring Cockneys, all pressing to catch a glimpse of that romantic lady, who stands, in the picture of Welbeck, with large melancholy eyes, and something fastidious and fantastic in her bearing, touching a table with the tips of long pointed fingers in calm assurance of immortal fame.[13]

Though the details are elevated and poeticised, Woolf's account reiterates the Duchess' dualism as it was in Pepys' account. The London crowd wait for a woman they know only through 'the picture of Welbeck' (presumably the Sir Peter Lely portrait of the Duchess in which she appears as her most noble). The crowd know her only through one of many of her mimetic and strategised displays of self. By the time of writing, Woolf was all too aware that Cavendish had not achieved the 'immortal fame' she was so apparently assured of; Woolf's Duchess is less ambitious and illustrious than grossly self-deluded.

Discussing her encounter with the Duchess, Cavendish's contemporary Mary Evelyn describes how she would 'go on magnifying her own generous actions […] – what did she not mention to his or her own advantage?'[14] The letter suggests that, not only in her own work, but even in her personal encounters, Cavendish would engage in extravagant displays of mask-making, amplifying elements of her personality and accomplishments. Again, she appears to manipulate the presentation of her selfhood at one remove. Her mien 'surpasses the imagination of poets', Mary Evelyn writes:

[13] Woolf, *The Common Reader*, p. 109.

[14] John Evelyn, *The Diary and Correspondence of John Evelyn,* ed. by William Bray, Volume 4 (London, 1854), p. 9.

> [A]t last I grew weary and concluded that the creature called a chimera, which I had heard speak of, was now to be seen, and that it was time to retire for fear of infection; yet I hope, as she is an original, she may never have a copy. Never did I see a woman so full of herself, so amazingly vain and ambitious.[15]

Cavendish is a Chimera, the hybrid creature of Greek mythology, made real; so deliberate in her self-fashioning, 'full of herself', or rather, full of *selves*. The myth tells of a Chimera's murder at the hands of Bellerophon who, tellingly, rides Pegasus into the battle. For Evelyn, then, Cavendish is far from the tenth muse worthy enough to ride the winged horse; she is rather the nemesis of such, symbolic of the infected and feral imagination. Indeed, the Chimera was traditionally an omen of disaster, a fire-breathing beast of disparate parts – lion, goat, snake. And while Woolf is more gracious in her appraisal, she too lists Cavendish's incongruent parts: there was something 'noble and Quixotic and high-spirited, as well as crack-brained and bird-witted, about her', she writes, identifying more than a doubleness, but a proliferation of selves and their concomitant masks.[16] Regardless of their disapproval, the fact that Cavendish features frequently in the diaries and correspondence of Pepys and the Evelyn family (each considered significant social commentators of seventeenth-century England) is testimony to just how *visible* she was and allowed herself to be. Their accounts confirm her status as a contemporary curio: for good or ill, they perpetuate the myth that surrounded her.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Woolf, *The Common Reader,* p. 108.

At the very heart of her own authorial manifesto, as it is conveyed piecemeal throughout her oeuvre, Cavendish extols the same chimerism that dismayed Evelyn:

> for I have not tyed myself to any one opinion, for sometimes one opinion crosses another; and in doing so, I do as several Writers do; onely they contradict one and another, and I contradict, or rather please my self, with the varieties of Opinions whatsoever. (*TWO,* 78)

Her self-fashioning surpasses doubleness. The lack of epistemic hegemony in her writing is purposeful: the instability of the self, manifested in her multiple, contradictory opinions, is desirable and pleasing. Her thoughts, 'various and extravagant', entertain themselves at one remove from her authority. As such, her responsibility for thinking them is displaced; they belong to an indefinite 'self'. The idea that the opposing factions of her mind might be at 'war' is one that recurs throughout Cavendish's work: in her *Observations*, the dispute between old and new ideas grows to such an extent that 'they were hardly able to compose the differences between themselves' – their reconciliation is instead left to the 'impartial Reader' (*OUEP,* 17). As such, the 'I' that fills the prefatory material to her work is destabilised and untrustworthy as the voice of *the* Margaret Cavendish. Her work is founded on a principle of displacement of 'self' that was anathema to her critics.

The fundamental aspect of selfhood with which Cavendish grapples, and one that profoundly impacts her pursuit for recognition, is that of her womanhood. One must be

wary of overstating Cavendish's assumed role as a torchbearer for women, as Jean Gagen might in making the Duchess' ambitions 'for herself and her sex' one and the same.[17] In fact, Cavendish's proto-feminism is, at best, inconsistent. Mary Ann McGuire identifies the anxious polarity at the heart of Cavendish's womanhood; she 'was unable to shake off old ideas of woman's innate inferiority but was uncomfortable with traditional female roles', as her play's heroines attest.[18] In the twentieth and twenty-first century, those feminist readers 'wishing to retrieve Cavendish from oblivion', when confronted with the flurry of contradictions throughout her oeuvre, 'often responded with a half-disappointed, half-defensive attitude' towards her nascent articulation of their cause.[19] Hilda Smith, for example, claims that 'none of the feminists considered sex roles more broadly than the duchess and none proved so reluctant to offer unambiguous conclusions'.[20] This question – as to what extent Cavendish's ventures usher in a renewed archetype for women – is arguably best resolved by Sara Mendelson's assertion that Cavendish was not a feminist, but 'an egoist who happened to be of the female gender'.[21] In the preface to *The World's Olio* (1655), she allows that some women may 'come to be far more knowing and learned' with education; their 'Barren' minds, once 'well mucked and well manured' may cultivate 'plentiful Crops, and sprout forth divers sorts of Flowers' (*TWO,*174). Yet, even then, these women lag behind the most prized male thinkers; 'the wisest Woman is not so wise as the wisest of Men', but may

17 Jean Gagen, 'Honor and Fame in the Works of the Duchess of Newcastle', *Studies in Philology*, 56, 3 (1959), pp. 519– 538 (p. 537).

18 Mary Ann McGuire, 'Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, on the Nature and Status of Women', *International Journal of Women's Studies,* 1, 2 (1978), pp. 193– 206 (p. 204).

19 Line Cottegnies and Nancy Weitz, 'Introduction' in Cottegnies and Weitz, eds., *Authorial Conquests*, p. 7.

20 Smith, *Reason's Disciples*, p. 76.

21 Mendelson, *The Mental World of Stuart Women,* p. 55.

only outrank 'some Rustick and Rude bredmen' whose minds, though 'fertiler and richer', grow 'rank and corrupt […] for want of Tilliage', she writes (*TWO*, sig.A6r). For all of her subversive philosophising, then, Cavendish's narrative does little to challenge the gender hierarchy of her time; the proto-feminist plea for advancements in the education of women could not overcome their natural subservience.

Suggesting only the limited potential of the learned woman, Cavendish empowers her own 'self' as the archetypal creator. She goes to great lengths to deny her education and influence by outside sources. Her ability derives from instinct rather than knowledge. One might then wonder where Cavendish would have placed herself in the gender hierarchy she posited. Later in the same text, *The World's Olio*, she determines that 'it is not so great a Fault in Nature of a Woman to be masculine, as for a Man to be Effeminate' (*TWO*,*84*). Here, the hierarchy she inferred not long before is replaced with a spectrum from man to woman, desirable to undesirable. In asserting her own hermaphroditism, in her approach both to her work and to her costume (as Pepys recalls), Cavendish sought to elevate herself above her female peers as a singular extraordinary woman, as *more* than a woman, but a pseudo or honorary male. While it is 'a Defect in Nature to decline, as to see Men like women; but to see a Masculine Woman, is but onely as if Nature had mistook, and had placed a Mans Spirit in a Womans Body', she writes (*TWO*,84). Though her stance on womanhood betrays her vaulting ambition, it is not without fault. Given her insistence on her singular mind and its natural and original conceptions, her introduction to *Natures Pictures* (1656) offers a peculiar confession:

> indeed I dare not examin the former times, for fear I should meet with such of my Sex, that have out-done all the glory I can aime at, or hope to attaine. (*NP*, sig. C1r)

Intriguingly, the admission is included in the original copy of the text, but was not reproduced in its following 1671 edition (one of several changes to the latter version).[22] Perhaps she had revealed too much: the mask had slipped.

The quotation encapsulates a combative doubleness of self as her insecurity – the fear that she might be found wanting – and her ambition grapple for predominance – that she might be a 'World, or nothing' (*PF,* sig. A6r). As Gagen writes in his study of honour and fame in Cavendish's writing, this insecurity/ambition binary might be reasoned thus:

> Her bashfulness and rankling sense of inferiority, which had made her days at court painful and a normal social life forever impossible for her, may well have been responsible for the development of what one may well call a neurotic pride, which resulted in a restless search for glory. The heavier the weight of her sense of inferiority, the more necessary a fantasy life was to provide her with the self-esteem which she needed to live in any kind of harmony with herself.[23]

[22] Cavendish also notably omits the text's frontispiece, a tableau of the family telling stories around the fire at Welbeck Abbey. The argument and remit of the text remains largely unchanged. The majority of changes are at sentence level.

[23] Gagen, 'Honor and Fame in the Works of the Duchess of Newcastle', p. 537.

It is at the intersection of insecurity and ambition that Cavendish's masks are made; they hide what she deems detrimental to her legacy (i.e., her lack of education is transmuted into a pleasing singularity of thought reminiscent of Arachne) and magnify what she wants to define her in posterity (i.e., the 'torment of [her] restless mind', (*PF,* 154)). And in the coming together of these facades, in her deliberate shapeshifting, her 'self' is made and continually unmade and made again. She is simultaneously a worm and a comet, an angel and a cavalier, a madwoman and a malcontent.

This study has discussed the extent of her 'madness'; though diagnosed as a pathological melancholic, Cavendish's claims to the melancholy of the *Problemata* – the condition shared by 'those who have become outstanding in philosophy, statesmanship, poetry or the arts' – was but another mask that she assumed and one that promised to counteract the burden of her sex. Indeed, in her own work, Cavendish had distinguished between the recognition available to men (apart from beasts, 'dead men live in living men, where beasts die without Record of beasts', she writes) and to women, who, 'Helpless for want of Power', must resign themselves to die in 'Oblivion for want of Fame' (*TWO,* 2; *O,* 226). The 'bashfulness' and 'rankling sense of inferiority' that Gagen identifies as the triggers of Cavendish's insecurity are, arguably, her self-conscious interpretation of the expectations of the seventeenth-century woman: 'for my bashfulness is my nature, not for any crime, and though I have strived and reasoned with myself, yet that which is inbred I find is difficult to root out' (*NP,* 381). The 'restless search for glory' that manifested is most prominently seen in her appropriation of genial melancholic motif in which her proclivity for mask-making paid dividends. In 1656,

three years after her writing debut, Cavendish made her most strident move to claim the 'gran folio' for her own by publishing her memoir in which her early childhood is threaded with the predilection for contemplation, solitude and study shown by countless celebrated men of learning before her. Whether the Duchess's belief that she experienced the genial condition was genuine or not, her 'True Relation' served as a powerful piece of propaganda. In her search, Cavendish had combined 'the older Renaissance ideals of heroic achievement, which were essentially aristocratic and masculine' with the naturally capricious and resourceful imagination of a woman in a mixture unsuited to the palettes of her peers.[24]

One might compare Cavendish's experience, or the relation of her experience, of melancholy with that of Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea (1661 – 1720). An acquaintance of Alexander Pope, contributing introductory verse to his *Works* (1717), Finch was supposedly satirised in his farce, *Three Hours After Marriage* (1717), written in collaboration with John Gay and John Arbuthnot. Indeed, Edward Parker, a known rival of Pope, had published his own 'key' to the play only months after its publication in which he identified Finch as the inspiration for the character Phoebe Clinket, a peculiar poetess, whose entrance reads:[25]

> *Enter Clinket, and her Maid bearing a Writing-Desk on her Back. Clinket Writing, her Headdress stain'd with Ink, and Pens stuck in her Hair.*

[24] Gagen, 'Honour and Fame in the Works of the Duchess of Newcastle', p. 521.

[25] McGovern, *Anne Finch and Her Poetry,* p. 104.

MAID I had as good carry a Raree-Show about the Street. Oh! How my Back akes!

CLINKET What are the Labours of the Back to those of the Brain? Thou Scandal to the Muses. I have now lost a Thought worth a Folio, by thy Impertinence.[26]

Finch scholars have since disputed whether Pope intended the connection (arguing that Parker had simply chosen Finch 'with obvious malice' in an effort to affect their friendship).[27] Instead, they offer Margaret Cavendish herself as a possible muse, or – most likely, given Cavendish's small reputation as a playwright – Susanna Centlivre (1667 – 1723), reportedly the most successful female playwright of the age.[28] Regardless of its inspiration, that the play includes a poetess turned madwoman is significant. The women writers of Finch's generation were still confronted with the assumption that the upshot of their creative ability was a hysterical brand of lunacy, not the genial melancholy experienced by their male counterparts. In the play, Clinket's Uncle Fossil laments her replacing domestic duties with the pursuit of authorship: 'instead of puddings, she makes pastorals'.[29]

[26] John Gay and John Arbuthnot, *Three Hours After Marriage: A Comedy as it is Acted at Theatre Royal* (London, 1717), p. 9.

[27] McGovern, *Anne Finch and Her Poetry,* p. 104.

[28] This 'success' is based on Centlivre having a total of 19 plays published and performed, ranking her above both Aphra Behn and Elizabeth Inchbald; Judith Philips Stanton, ''This New– Found Path Attempting'': Women Dramatists in England, 1660– 1800' in Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski, eds., *Curtain Calls: British and American Women and the Theater, 1660– 1820* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991), pp. 325– 54 (p. 336).

[29] Gay, *Three Hours After Marriage,* p. 9.

Finch's supposed link to Clinket does little to convey the popularity that she garnered within her own lifetime; though she does not command a large space in the literary canon, she will surely be remembered as a melancholic woman ahead of Cavendish. This is almost entirely due to her account of the condition in her Pindaric ode, 'The Spleen' (1701), a poem readily received by her contemporaries. First appearing anonymously in Charles Gildon's *New Collection of Poems for Several Occasions* (1701), the piece was republished in several iterations. Eight years later, it featured in the bootleg pamphlet of Henry Hills, before Finch included it in her own *Miscellany Poems, on Several Occasions* (1713) – credited 'To a Lady' in its first year and thereafter bearing her name.[30] The poem's contemporary impact was then no doubt confirmed with its inclusion in the preface to Doctor William Stukeley's medical lecture, *Of the Spleen* in 1723. As Barbara McGovern writes, the popularity of the poem throughout the eighteenth century did not sustain Finch's reputation: 'many of her greatest poems would be buried in the rubble of neglected Augustan philosophical and didactic poetry'.[31] Like Cavendish, Finch's critical heritage appears to have suffered from the fickle fashions of literary history, or, as Germaine Greer dubs it, the 'phenomenon of the transience of female literary fame'. Indeed, Greer goes further, suggesting that 'almost uninterruptedly since the Interregnum', a small group of writing women have 'enjoyed dazzling literary prestige during their own lifetimes, only to vanish without a trace from the records of posterity'.[32] Though Finch did not disappear from the canon

[30] Barbara McGovern, *Anne Finch and Her Poetry: A Critical Biography* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1992), p. 93.

[31] McGovern, *Anne Finch and Her Poetry,* p. 159.

[32] Germaine Greer, 'Flying Pigs and Double Standards', *Times Literary Supplement* (24th July 1974), pp. 784– 7 (p. 784).

entirely (her poem, 'A Nocturnal Reverie' was famously admired by Wordsworth, for instance), it is true that, by her sex, Finch's 'fame' is made vulnerable to the waxing and waning of literary tastes. Though Cavendish's reception amongst her contemporaries is arguably questionable to begin with, the readership and scholarship of both women is filled with 'holes and hiatuses'.[33]

They lived notably similar lives, sharing a noble status, a childless marriage, a life punctuated by political upheaval and an eventual country retreat. Finch's suggestion that '[m]y hand delights to trace the unusual things, and it deviates from the common and known way' would be inconspicuous amongst Cavendish's prefatory epistles.[34] In their experiences of melancholy, however, recent scholarship is clear to distinguish their contributions to the literary canon. Their critical receptions inherit their respective engagement with the concept of 'discursive authority'; where Finch succeeds, Cavendish falls short. Indeed, Finch's melancholy, bolstered by its visibility and appreciation amongst eighteenth-century literati, is celebrated for its sincerity and made a lynchpin of her study, while Cavendish's melancholy – albeit filtered through her divisively bombastic, eccentric persona – is marginalised and mythologised.

This study does not look to posit the viability of Cavendish's melancholic experience but rather to argue that, in its choreographed unconventionality, and despite it, her consideration of the nexus of womanhood, melancholy and genius, is still worthy of scholarly attention. She arguably belongs alongside other supposed 'imitators' or

[33] Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* (London: Virago, 1977), p. 12.

[34] Anne Finch, *Miscellany Poems, On Several Occasions* (London, 1713) p. 92.

'pretenders' to the tradition of genial melancholy, such as James Carkesse (c. 1636 – post 1683). Carkesse's collection of verse, *Lucid Intervals*, reveals a similar preoccupation with the idea that 'Prophets and Poets Mad are (in a sense)/ And Sober grow, as they their gift dispense'.[35] The circumstances of his six-month incarceration in Bedlam asylum are suspicious: the poet himself claims to be 'Acting the Part' of the madman and later appears as the headmaster of Chelmsford School.[36] In their imitation of such 'mad' credentials, these writers do not upend the tradition, but rather reinforce its cultural significance and authorising power. Cavendish does not look to destabilise it, but to be part of it.

If one can acknowledge the deliberate strategising behind Cavendish's persona, both on and off the page, then, one must extrapolate the same self-consciousness to the depiction of her melancholic condition in which illness empowers the imagination. As a letter from Mark Anthony Benoist, tutor to Newcastle's sons, suggests, Cavendish's diversion from the 'usual Methods' of poetry, drama and philosophy proves an 'occasion for amazement': 'I am extreme sensible, that even what is commonly called Defect, here becomes comly, like some Moles in a beautiful Face', he writes.[37] In this context, such 'Moles' or mouches serve as a metaphor for the concealment, distraction and ennoblement at the heart Cavendish's performative strategy. The 'mouche' elevates the scar or pockmark to a beguiling signifier, a 'Defect' to a 'comly' signature, just as

[35] James Carkesse, *Lucida Intervalla, Containing Divers Miscellaneous Poems, Written at Finsbury and Bethlem* (London, 1679) p. 36.

[36] James Carkesse, *Lucida Intervalla,* p. 34; Nicholas Jagger, 'Carkesse, James' (b. 1636), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/4666> [accessed January 2019].

[37] *Letters and Poems,* p. 81.

Cavendish's narrative looks to elevate her womanhood to pseudo-masculinity and her melancholy to noble genius. One should be careful about relegating Cavendish's condition on the basis of such 'defects', but should instead ask why they are there and what are they hiding?

APPENDIX

The contents of the 'Booke, wherein is Contained Rare Minerall Receipts Collected at Paris from those Who hath had great Experience of them', The University of Nottingham, 'PwV – Literary Manuscripts in the Portland (Welbeck) Collection, 16th – 19th centuries', MSS PwV 90[38]

- fols. 3r– 5v: A recipe created by Sir Théodore Mayerne, 'The Description of Salt of Steele or Anima Hepatis; the which is Sr Theador Mayernes Invention' (PwV 90/1).

- fols. 5v– 6v: 'The virtues of the Antimoniall Cup' (PwV 90/2).

- fols. 6v– 8r: A letter from Sir Thomas Cademan to Lord Marquise of Newcastle, containing news of his recent medical services for the King – 29 August 1647 (PwV 90/3).

- fols. 8v– 13v: Sir Théodore Mayerne's 'Description of Remedys for the Lord Henry Cavendish, against the Spleene & Vapours ariseing to the head' (PwV 90/4).

- fols. 14r– 21r: A letter from Mayerne to the Marquise, addressing problems of 'Melancholyk Hypochondriack' and his similarly afflicted Wife – 24 May 1648 (PwV 90/5).

[38] At present, only half of the material contained within the manuscript has been catalogued by the university's archivists. These entries are denoted by the inclusion of a catalogue number beginning 'PwV 90/' and their citations are adapted from the archive's own contents page for the manuscript (prefixed to its microfilm copy). After folio 53r, however, all entries are my own.

- fols. 21v– 23r: A letter from Dr William Davison to the Marquise, regarding recommendations for purging the spleen (PwV 90/6).

- fols. 23v– 24r: A recipe by Dr Davison (PwV 90/7).

- fols. 25r– 28v: A letter from Mayerne to the Marquise, concerning the problems of the Marquise's wife (PwV 90/8).

- fols. 29r– 31r: A letter from Mayerne to the Marquise, concerning the Marquise's health, including remedies for 'Hot blood' – 28 June 1649 (PwV 90/9).

- fols. 31v– 32r: Mayerne's recipe for haemorrhoids (PwV 90/10).

- fol. 32r: Dietary advice from Mayerne to the Marquise (PwV 90/11).

- fols. 32v– 36r: Blank pages.

- fols. 37r– 38r: A recipe for a 'cordiall' created by the Duke of Northumberland (PwV 90/12/1).

- fols. 38v– 39r: A recipe for the preparation of 'Creame of Tartar' created by the Duke of Northumberland (PwV 90/12/2).

- fols. 39r– 40r: A recipe for 'oyle of Sulpher' created by the Duke of Northumberland (PwV 90/12/3).

- fols. 40r– 41v: A recipe for 'Milke of Sulpher' created by the Duke of Northumberland (PwV 90/12/4).

- fol. 42r: A recipe for 'Imeture of Gold' created by the Duke of Northumberland (PwV 90/12/5).

- fols. 42v– 43v: A recipe for ‘Scammony’ created by the Duke of Northumberland (PwV 90/12/6).

- fols. 43v– 45r: A recipe for opium to stop ‘all fluxes of Blood’ created by the Duke of Northumberland (PwV 90/12/7).

- fol. 45r: A recipe for ‘the Vitriol and Spirit of Silver’ to be used for ‘all diseases of the head’ created by the Duke of Northumberland (PwV 90/12/8).

- fol. 46r: A letter from the Duke of Northumberland to Kenelm Digby, outlining how the addition of ‘oule of Carebe’ to tobacco in a pipe can purge vapours in the head (PwV 90/13/1).

- fols. 46v– 47r: Various recipes for medicines created by the Duke of Northumberland (PwV 90/13/2).

- fols. 47v– 53r: Letter notes by Kenelm Digby, discussing the merits of ‘Powder of Vipers’ followed by recipes on how to prepare it (PwV 90/13/3).

- fol. 53r– v: A recipe for the ‘Julep’ by order of Dr Davison to ‘loosen the Belly’.

- fols. 54r– 55v: Various recipes on how to prepare ‘Cristal Mineralis’, how to cure ‘a looseness’ and soothe ‘sore eyes’.

- fols. 55v– 57v: Recipes provided by Mr Basincotes, an apothecary in Paris, including the ‘true manner’ in which to prepare crocus metallorum and the preparation, use and virtues of ‘Cristal Mineralis’.

- fol. 58r– v: The preparation and use of Vitriol.

- fol. 59r– v: How to make Spirit of Salt and the virtues of it.

- fol. 60r: ‘The matter of making that water which Dr Davison did prescribe for Sir Charles’ footman where with he was cured of a great and strange cough’.

- fol. 60v: ‘The preparation of divers sorts of [poultices] for all sorts of hot swellings’.

- fol. 61r: ‘A [poultice] to ripen sore fingers or any Impostumes in short time’.

- fol. 61v– 62v: A recipe for Salt of Steele and Cream of Tartar with ‘the manner howe to infuse one of the papers of crocus metallorum’.

- fol. 63r: ‘My Lady Marquesse of Newcastle’s receipt to cure a fluxe or dissentorye’.

- fols. 63v– 66v: Various recipes given to the Marquise from Doctor Rodin in Paris.

- fols. 67r– 68v: Mr Phillip’s recipes for infused waters (including saffron, rosemary and treacle) and an account of ‘their several virtues’.

- fols. 69r– 70v: Doctor Bispham’s recipe to make ‘an excellent balsum for any greene wound’.

- fols. 70v– 71r: Sir Thomas Cademan’s way to make a pomander.

- fols. 72r– 74r: A letter from Mr Farrer to the Marquise concerning the health of Sir Thomas Glenham – 27 July 1649.

- fols. 75v– 78v: Mr Farrer’s recipe for Sir Thomas Glenham including a remedy for dropsy.

- fols. 78v– 81r: ‘An other letter from Mr Farrer to the Lord Marquise’ concerning his lady, who is ‘highly affected with the spleen’.

- fols. 81v– 82v: Doctor Farrer's recipe for the 'sterilliste in vomits'.

- fol. 83r– v: Thomas Glenham's way to cure an ague.

- fols. 84r– 85v: Mr Rust's way to make barley cream and almond butter.

- fol. 86r– v: A recipe for the Earl of Chesterfield's 'Diaphoreastick Powder'.

- fol. 87r– v: A recipe for the Countess of Kent's powder and 'the manner how to make Gascon's powder which Mr Rust had from the Countess of Arundel'.

- fols. 88r– 91r: Various recipes from Mr Rust and Doctor King, including how to make mead.

- fols. 91v– 92r: Thomas Michall's way to 'boyle a carpe'.

- fols. 93r– 94v: 'A rare secret called villemaigne to cure a horse when he is pricked' followed by a recipe 'to make a horses hoofes grow and to keep them fresh' and one 'to cure a broken– winded horse'.

- fol. 96r– v: 'The manner how the spaw waters are to be taken at Antwerp by the right honourable Lady Marquesse of Newcastle'.

- fol. 97r: 'A Ladys way to stew a carpe'.

- fols. 97v– 98r: A remedy for cough, created by Robert Askins.

- fols. 98v: Sir Walter Ralegh's receipt for stomach pills.

- fol. 99r: A letter from Mr Rust to the Marquise concerning his order of crocus metallorum.

- fol. 99v: ‘An approved medicine agaynst melancholy, given mee by a Nun, at Antwerp’.

- fols. 100r– 103r: Doctor Frayser’s recipe for ‘the collicke and the spleen’.

- fols. 103v– 105r: Various recipes for an ague, ‘stoping of the ears’ and ‘collicke of the stomacke’.

- fols. 105v– 106r: ‘Sir Thomas Alisburies letter to the most honour Lord Marquesse of Newcastle for the collick in the stomack’– 8 February 1654.

- fols. 106v– 107r: ‘A letter from Mr Rust an apothecary at London about the collicke in my stomack’.

- fols. 107v– 108r: Various recipes from Mr Rust including one for ‘the Glister’.

- fols. 108v– 114r: ‘A letter from that most famous, earnest and excellent physician Mr Théodore Mayerne about the collicke in my stomack’ – 29 March 1654.

- fols. 114v– 166v: ‘Sir Théodore Mayerns Advice for my Lady and my Selfe’.

- fols. 116v– 118r: Various recipes containing ‘certaine notes out of several letters by the advice of Sir Théodore Mayerne to Mr Rust an apothecary at London’.

- fol. 118v: Mr Rust’s recipe for balsam and amber pills.

- fols. 119r– 194r: Blank pages.

- fol. 195r: A list of measurements – ‘Of Weights’ – including ‘drammes’, ounces and pounds.

- fol. 196r: ‘How to fatt Chickens’.

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